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Addictive Reading: Nineteenth-Century Drug Literature's Possible Worlds

Adam Colman
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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**ADDICTIVE READING: NINETEENTH-CENTURY DRUG LITERATURE'S
POSSIBLE WORLDS**

A Dissertation Presented

By

ADAM COLMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2016

Department of English

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ADAM COLMAN

Approved as to style and content by:

Suzanne Daly, Chair

Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge, Member

Heather Richardson, Member

Jenny Spencer, Department Chair
Department of English

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ABSTRACT

ADDICTIVE READING: NINETEENTH-CENTURY DRUG LITERATURE'S POSSIBLE WORLDS

MAY 2016

ADAM COLMAN, B.A., DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
M.A., BROWN UNIVERSITY
Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Directed by: Suzanne Daly

This dissertation looks at nineteenth-century British writers who developed aesthetic strategies for making use of the patterns of addiction. A number of other studies on addiction in the nineteenth century have detailed how the medicalization of addiction emerged through efforts at social control; this study, meanwhile, looks at the literary discoveries made by writers who considered that medical problem. Specifically, this dissertation considers how writers built texts around addicted characters whose condition drives them always to search for something more even while they live repetitiously, resulting in addiction-like narratives, or repetitive texts of endless pursuit. Such literary, aesthetic strategies of addiction, this dissertation argues, emphasize narratives structured around affectively charged, exploratory repetition.

My first chapter is an introduction of the overall argument. The second chapter deals with Percy Shelley's poetics of world-shaping habit, which he derived as a corrective response to the frightening power he saw in intemperance, and which he described as a healthier version of intemperance. Chapter three concerns itself with Thomas De Quincey's aesthetic of exploratory repetitions, as evoked by the narrative of his own drug use. The fourth chapter closely reads Christina Rossetti's and Alfred

Tennyson's conflicted, "double" poems about addicts who see strangeness in their material surroundings. The fifth chapter examines George Eliot's and Charles Dickens's serial novels about addicted or addict-like investigators, and the final chapter argues that optative movement among indolent yet scientifically curious habitual drinkers shapes Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Each chapter after the introduction concentrates on particular formal innovations, or innovative uses of a pre-existing form, that operate as part of a text's generally addiction-like strategy for outlining possibility through repetitive familiarity.

The theoretical framework for this project draws from a tradition of criticism that focuses on literary orientation toward possibility and possible worlds. Possible-worlds theorists and critics have described how specific attitudes toward possibility shape texts; addiction, I argue, intensifies a sense of unattained possibility that must be endlessly sought, and so addiction-like narratives consequently involve narrative worlds of intensified mystery and possibility.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ADDICTIVE POSSIBILITIES

This is the story behind the good sort of addiction. That “good sort” is not, I must be clear, the medical condition of substance dependence, which is disastrously harmful and potentially life-threatening. Instead, by “good sort of addiction,” I refer to the sense of addiction we find throughout pop-culture criticism. We see it in descriptions of videogames, in articles on music, and in television reviews like Kirsten Acuna’s piece on *Breaking Bad*, where she uses the language of drug use to celebrate a television show (which is, in this case, a show about a methamphetamine-dealer named Walt). “If you’re binge-watching,” Acuna writes, “‘Breaking Bad’ becomes as addictive as the blue meth Walt’s buyers can’t go without.”

Acuna is quite specific about the nature of *Breaking Bad*’s good sort of addictiveness. She argues that the show’s habit-forming property comes from its strategy to promise new information in each chapter: “The final 12–15 minutes of nearly every episode,” she writes, “usually has a huge plot turn.” For Acuna, addiction doesn’t mean only a life-destroying habit. The word has a positive sense, too, denoting a sober desire for encounters with more and more and more, an *exploratory* consideration of something new and different, an orientation toward constantly promised narrative possibility. Such an addiction—not substance dependence itself, once again, but rather an aesthetic experience *like* that dependence due to similarly pursued repetitions—combines the propulsion of desire with learning. This is what I will call the aesthetic of addiction, a category of aesthetic experience in which compelling possibility is suggested most

intensely and repetitively. “Intense, repetitive pursuit of the possible,” granted, is a phrase that covers far more than addiction, but I will discuss this aesthetic experience in relation to addiction because 1) “addiction” remains a popular term for this phenomenon and 2) aesthetic orientation toward intensely, repetitively sensed possibility emerged quite emphatically, I will show, in literature that dealt with substance dependence.

There are, too, a number of parallels between actual substance dependence and the aesthetic category I term “addictive” or “addiction-like.” As described by the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Medical Disorders*, the physiological condition of substance dependence compels ongoing pursuit of more and more through “a pattern of repeated self-administration” (176). In other words, both the aesthetic category of addiction and literal addiction involve repetitive pursuit of that which can never be satisfyingly, ultimately attained—a pursuit of that which always remains elusive and suggestive of further possibility. Yet there remain obvious differences between the two senses of addiction, between the health problem and the aesthetic category, and before going further I want to clarify those differences. Medically understood addiction, or substance dependence, often torments those who suffer from it, overrides their will, and drives them to consume a substance “despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the substance” (*DSM-IV* 181). Meanwhile, the aesthetic version of addiction that Acuna and countless others describe (the sort of addiction with which my study chiefly deals) requires no substance-consumption while it encourages exploratory and conscious attention to difference, strangeness, and novelty. The addictive allure of *Breaking Bad*, in Acuna’s view, depends on curiosity about “huge plot turns,” on an

investigatory attitude toward always-developing and always-promised changes. Rather than serving as a mindless compulsion toward sameness, routine merges with its opposite for the figuratively addicted audience's contemplation. *Breaking Bad*'s merely addiction-like form—its episodically plot-driven tantalization—establishes the rhythms of that routine engagement with the non-routine, structuring the aesthetic experience by which an audience enjoys exploration of strangeness through habit.¹

In what follows, I examine how patterns of the perilous condition of addiction informed this exploratory aesthetic. I specifically look at Britain in the nineteenth century, when addiction became an established medical condition that, from its inception, bore the weight of an array of meanings beyond simply those of a health hazard. Addiction in Britain only became widely medically recognized once intensely potent habits had become central for so many different aspects, bad and good, of British life. Heightened consumerism and a corresponding rise in global commerce during the nineteenth century, for instance, were increasingly dependent upon addictive substances such as rum, tobacco, and opium.² Enlightenment thinkers including Hume, Burke, and others had also in the eighteenth century advocated custom and habit as the mechanisms for society's stability at a time when social habits frequently occurred in coffee-houses and taverns. And as the nineteenth century progressed, the scientific method, by which habitually repetitive experiment drives ceaselessly toward some experiential knowledge yet to be had, gained

¹ I do not, either, want to rule out the possibility that some forms of media and narrative deemed addictive may be experienced through compulsions fed by the same brain-chemistry as actual drug addiction. But my focus is on the aesthetic category and strategies of addiction rather than on defining the entire range of affective responses to addiction-like narratives, responses that are highly variable from person to person and in most if not all cases demonstrably not the same as the experience of morphine addiction, for instance.

² Mark Kishlansky in *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603–1714* notes that in the seventeenth century, Britain was already met with “an amazing assortment of new products, such as tobacco, sugar, rum, gin, port, champagne, peppermint and Cheddar cheese. Tea, coffee and chocolate produced a revolution not only in habits of consumption but also in diet” (2). Most of those items are either literally, chemically addictive or colloquially described as such.

increased cultural significance as the figure of the professional scientist was born. Key figures in the age's science, moreover, self-experimented with drugs and eventually developed addictions themselves, making their intensely repetitive investigation of worldly possibility seem all the more evidently addiction-like. Writers covered by the present study thus had an expanse of meaning to draw from when they represented addiction, and that sheer sense of variety accompanied their dramatizations of addictive consumption. In short, the writers in the following chapters typically saw literal addiction as a true hazard, but they also evoked a corresponding, addiction-*like*, repetitive pursuit that intimated great variety and possibility.

There were a number of good reasons for nineteenth-century writers to pattern texts after addictive pursuit of possibility. As a sales strategy, peddling addiction-like enjoyment is demonstrably savvy, and repetitively consumed serial fictions were certainly designed and produced to meet regular consumer desires.³ But this study's point is not simply that addiction-like literary techniques were devised to hold an audience's interest, maintain consumerist desire, or control those consumerist cravings. Those uses of addiction-like techniques have been effectively illuminated by others (especially Susan Zieger and Clifford Siskin in their work on addiction discourse's role as a mechanism for social control). Again, this study will instead concern how reliance on addiction-like

³Generally, too, the same forces scholars have cited as responsible for the English novel's form (and its success with readers) can all be found within addiction discourse; those forces include response to a rise in individualist consumerism, engagement with individual desires through prevalent ideologies of control, and acceptance of medical science that sought to express and categorize existence in authoritatively diagnostic language. Colin Campbell locates consumerism at the heart of Romanticism in *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*; Ian Watt has noted that same consumerist, bourgeois ethic at the core of the English novel as it developed through Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*; in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong finds in domestic novels the rise of a disciplined sense of individual selfhood, particularly in terms of gender roles; Lawrence Rothfield in *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* relates the rise of realist novels that critique social ills to the contemporaneous rise of medical science and medical approaches to social problems.

aesthetic strategies intensified literary orientation toward possibility by sustaining narratives of emphatically reiterative exploration. Those strategies were many, but at the early period of the aesthetic tradition on which I focus, they tended to involve representation of addicted or addict-like characters inclined to hunger intensely and repetitively after mystery.

As mentioned, historically specific attitudes toward habitual behavior made different metaphorical senses of substance dependence all the more available to nineteenth-century writers. As science was professionalizing, it turned more regimented and habitual in the nineteenth century—the very word “scientist” was developed in the 1830s, and later representative Victorian scientists such as Thomas Huxley reckoned with a sense of scientific practice “as a useful profession” (White 31).⁴ Yet nineteenth-century science proved also exploratory and imaginative as hypothesis-driven, inductive work gained prominence. Jonathan Smith has described how nineteenth-century science came to describe facts as necessarily grasped through theory (22). That emphasis on imaginative hypothesis was shared by Romantic-era scientists as well as Victorians—including William Whewell, who devised the word “scientist” in a discussion with Coleridge (see Snyder 368), and John Stuart Mill, who “was opposed to Whewell’s idealism” but who nevertheless had written on the necessity of hypotheses (J. Smith 31).⁵

Mill’s outline of the scientific method in his *System of Logic* places hypothesis at the core of scientific work; he writes there that often “what is an hypothesis at the beginning of the inquiry becomes a proved law of nature before its close” (292). And this

⁴ For more on the rise of the Victorian scientific professional, see Jack Meadows’s *The Victorian Scientist: The Growth of a Profession*.

⁵ Richard Yeo’s *Defining Science* provides a useful overview of William Whewell’s role in the invention of the professional scientist.

hypothesis, a useful device for arriving at proved natural law, has “no other limits” beyond “those of the human imagination” (*System of Logic* 290). To derive natural law from whatever the scientist imagines, however, would require repetitive experiment; Mill writes of a need to “assure ourselves, by a repetition of the observation or the experiment” (*System of Logic* 252). Imagination and speculation thus joined with nineteenth-century science’s repetitive experimentation for the establishment of natural laws. Developed in part via the work of Romantic scientists (among them Whewell, Humphry Davy, and other close associates of Samuel Taylor Coleridge), this speculative scientific study entailed a general, repetitive questing for more: more experience, more understanding, more knowledge, always suggested by an imaginative scientific mind.⁶

That repetitively experimental quest could become figured as addiction-like once addiction was a known condition, and in the nineteenth century, the rise of professional medicine and medical journals supported an increasingly medicalized discussion of drug habituation. “Habitual use, what we would now call addiction, caused less concern,” notes Virginia Berridge, than other risks of drug use in the nineteenth century (*Demons* 26), but the problems of habitual use were at least registered. Throughout the nineteenth century, contradicting a tradition that had viewed tendencies toward intoxication as primarily moral flaws and following the eighteenth-century work of Benjamin Rush and Thomas Trotter, habitual intoxication became increasingly described as a disease, in a variety of medical publications (for one overview of this development, see Harry G. Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction”). Words like “alcoholic” and “addict,” now our

⁶ David Hume linked understanding of actuality with our ability to think of it in terms of possibility. Hume writes, “Where-ever the imagination perceives a difference among ideas, it can easily produce a separation,” noting that conceiving of splitting things apart allows for recognition of those essential, actual things that cannot be further divided (*Treatise of Human Nature* 8).

standard terms for describing substance-dependence, emerged in the nineteenth century, even if terms like “intemperance” or “inebriate” remained most commonly used to denote the same phenomenon.⁷ Temperance movements, too, became potent cultural and political forces in the nineteenth century, signaling a broader public concern with habitual inebriation. Addiction may not have been the preferred term, and clearly fears about opium habituation were not strong enough to regulate the substance in any real way prior to the 1868 Pharmacy Act, but what we now call addiction was recognized as early as the eighteenth century, and increasingly described by writers such as Coleridge, De Quincey, and later authors who would cite them.

The prominence of nineteenth-century scientists’ drug use lent a peculiar framework for thinking about this newly observed and increasingly troubling medical problem. And scientific, habitual drug use directly impacted nineteenth-century writers: consider opium-dependent Samuel Taylor Coleridge and cocaine-addicted Sigmund Freud.⁸ Both habitually took intoxicants as part of chemical or medical studies they found aesthetically pleasing, after which they developed addictions, and both wrote texts widely thought to be influenced by their habitual intoxication. But theirs were just cases in which desirous, repetitive experiment could seem most obviously related to addiction. In general, professional science was known to require intensely repetitive and yet personally imaginative drives to confront something new in the material world, via a method thus framed as especially addiction-like. Those such as Freud would only make the

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s earliest noted use of “alcoholism” is from 1848; and though “addiction” had been used to mean habitual compulsion to intoxication well before the mid-nineteenth century, the *OED*’s first noted use of “addict” as a noun is from 1899.

⁸ Coleridge had begun some of his (not addictive) drug use as scientific experiment at the Pneumatic Institute that included Thomas Beddoes and Tom Wedgwood, among whom he had experimented with nitrous oxide; with Wedgwood, particularly, he sought out cannabis. Molly Lefebure writes, “The suggestion, sometimes made, that these two invalids were proposing to embark upon an intensive medical cure together can only be dismissed as impossibly naive” (63).

association between scientific and addictive pursuits more obvious as the century progressed.⁹

The following question might arise at this point: why should literary texts reflecting the patterns of intensely repetitive possibility-pursuit (even when centered around addicted characters) not be considered science-like, rather than addiction-like? Either term might be appropriate enough, were it not for the fact that the term “addiction-like” covers more essential details of the sort of narratives under discussion. These details include: characters driven by desire and affective impulses in a manner evocative of addiction; the fact that such texts arose during the emergence of addiction discourse in particular and more frequently involved clearly addicted characters than they involved scientists; and the way such texts’ repetitive possibility-pursuits do not quite have science’s grave responsibility to actuality. This justification for my distinction between “addiction-like” and “science-like,” however, is not meant to suggest a pure separation between the two. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, describes the Dionysian aesthetic experience associated with intoxication as a way to access the previously unintelligible, and so art, for Nietzsche, suggests “a necessary correlative of and supplement to science” (80). The addiction-like is, similarly, always in part the science-like, even if the addiction-like pertains to a stronger element of emotional craving than we might normally find in scientific work. (In case further terminology questions remain, I include a brief list of key terms and my own definitions at the end of this chapter.)

⁹ Readers of Freud and Coleridge will be familiar with that intertwinement between repetitive, personal pleasure and repetitive experiment, an intertwinement that their addictions reflected. “The most striking feature of *Über Coca*,” writes Howard Markel about Freud’s celebratory study of cocaine’s medicinal value, “is how Sigmund incorporates his own feelings, sensations, and experiences into his scientific observations” (82).

Yet even if we accept that addiction-like methods allow for greater imaginative exploration than the science-like, we might still face objections about the viability of addictive aesthetic strategies for creative exploration. Shouldn't an addiction-like strategy produce stagnating forms, or dull repetitions—shouldn't addiction, a frightening medical problem, smother possibility even in the aesthetic strategies it inspires? What matters here is the difference between *addiction as substance dependence* and the other, figurative sense of the word “addiction,” which I call *the addiction-like*. The addiction-like, once recognized and approached deliberately, holds creative promise that extends beyond addictive and scientific reiterations: that which is *like* an overwhelming desire can have overwhelming desire's tendency to compel one intensely toward otherness, without desire's tendency to limit conceivability around an obsessively desired object. The philosopher and theorist of possibility Gregory Currie puts it simply: “there is such a thing as imagining that is desire-like” (204). This, he writes, “helps explain the affective consequences of imagination” (211). He notes that “the effect of shifting” from desire to “desire-like imaginings is to free the subject from external constraint” (214). We can affectively and successfully access the possible, Currie argues, not exactly through desire, which can overrun and constrain thought, but through something “desire-like,” wherein a more conscious impulse brings us toward thoughtful consideration of the always-yet-to-be-grasped (the possible).¹⁰ And because substance dependence, according to the *DSM-IV*, revolves around “craving,” or “a strong subjective drive to use the substance” (176), something that is *like* substance dependence can present a similarly strong degree of creative potential, becoming a powerful tool for opening up cognition of possibility. In

¹⁰ The question of the distinction between “fictional” and “possible” has opened a great deal of debate. Overview of this problem can be found in Ruth Ronen's *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. My own study approaches the fictional as an exaggerated form of the possible—not as an entirely different species.

the nineteenth century, the use of addiction-like properties for the creation of habitually consumable literature meant precisely this; addiction-like literature (literature patterned after addictive habits) would intensify creative explorations of the possible, as is most abundantly evident in stories about addicted investigators and addicted pursuers.¹¹

Among the works built around addicted investigators were some of the most influential popular entertainments, from Dickens's novels to the Sherlock Holmes stories. While addiction-like techniques bolstered narrative emphasis on investigating possibility, then, they also accompanied an expansion in the domain of literary invention.¹² This should not be surprising. As far back as Aristotle, philosophers and critics have been reminding their audience that fiction itself results from an engagement with possibility.¹³ Lubomír Doležel writes that fictionality works as a particular approach to the possibility making up a "universe of discourse" that is "not restricted to the actual world but spreads over uncountable possible, nonactualized worlds" (13).¹⁴ It is no wonder, then, that

¹¹ Peter Brooks describes a fundamental relationship between desire and the forging of interconnected worlds of a novelistic narrative; he writes, "Desire necessarily becomes textual by way of a specifically narrative impulse, since desire is metonymy, a forward drive in a signifying chain" (105). When desire can be traced to something external to the desirer—a matter of addiction to something consumed, not an internal, inherent drive—it becomes even more expansively metonymic, more connected to related things, to a world in process. Myriad, attendant novelistic realms can thus follow, as they did follow from nineteenth-century addiction discourse.

¹² While examining that intensified, literary orientation toward possibility, I am influenced by the work of possible-worlds theorists who recount how literature in general results from attention to possibility (Doležel, Pavel) and from those who consider ways in which the actual must be known as it relates to the possible (Kripke, D. Lewis). These theorists and philosophers, whether intentionally or not, investigate problems related to the concerns of both writers and scientists of the nineteenth-century, to whom possible worlds were of real interest (William Whewell himself wrote a monograph titled *On the Plurality of Worlds*).

¹³ Aristotle in the *Poetics* notes three kinds of mimetic poetry, two of which clearly imitate possibilities rather than certain actuality: "the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case" and "the kind of thing that ought to be the case" (42). Modal logicians have broadened this, focusing on how language in general engages in the possible. See, for instance, *Naming and Necessity*, where Saul Kripke describes how language functions meaningfully with regard to possible worlds.

¹⁴ Thomas Pavel discusses the possibility emerging even in reference that has the dullest consensus behind it: "referential behavior," he notes, "includes a creative, risk-taking aspect, as well as a tendency to settle down into conventional patterns" (27). The patterns of linguistic reference are loaded with possible meanings, in other words, from the start, even as their patterns provide reliability and comfort, and fictional texts exploit that function of language.

addiction-like techniques have structured a profusion of fictional worlds, given the need to found such worlds upon a sense of the nonactualized, the unattained. Addiction heightens the sense of unattained possibility, and the endlessly investigative, addiction-like approach to literary form allows writers and readers access to innumerable worlds of possibility without the oppression of the physical condition itself.

I use the term “world” here to describe the narrative realm writers create with each work, and I do so with regard to the sense of “world” used by possible-worlds theorists such as Pavel and Doležel. “Fictional world” in this sense means a set of possible relations within conditions and boundaries set by a text, and fiction’s possible worlds do not need to be possible *now*, in the present tense and in our given present conditions. In the case of futuristic science fiction or convincing realist fiction set in the present moment, a narrative will surely seem more possible to the contemporary reader than historical fiction in which Napoleon never set foot in France, but that historical fiction still explores a possible world, though it is one based on different temporal conditions. This is why I find it useful to consider all fictional worlds as possible worlds.

Let me give an example of a fictional world formed by a very specific orientation toward possibility: the children’s book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. The story distills the most basic, requisite element of fiction-making—the exploration of “what if”—and it emphasizes the appetitive nature of that exploration. The book is patterned after its titular mouse’s hunger for more and more and more; the story directs itself intensely toward possibility from its title on, beginning with that conditional “if.” If you give a mouse a cookie, the mouse is bound to start demanding milk, which creates a new condition to consider, and if you give the mouse milk, there will come a demand for a straw, and so

on. Maybe you will never actually give the mouse a cookie, and maybe you would never actually follow that gift with milk, but this does not matter: the story is off and running (in, again, a manner reflective of the mouse's cravings). Conditions have been established, and possibilities within those conditions are then explored in a desire-like (or hunger-like, or thirst-like) way. It follows that addiction's intensified, hungrier orientation toward possibilities would suggest an intensified profusion of addiction-like, narrative realms of more exaggerated possibility. After the nineteenth century's association of addiction with scientific study, moreover, one could still more readily think of the addiction-like as exploratory pursuit, and Victorian fiction that was structured around wandering, adventuring, explicitly addicted characters—characters like Dr. Jekyll or Sherlock Holmes—portrayed realms of intensified possibility often accessed through investigative studies of a mystery or otherness.¹⁵

To be sure, before addiction was a widely recognized medical problem, there was still awareness of affectively charged repetitions that lead toward new experience and understanding of possibility—Humphry Davy was pursuing such personally enthralled science all on his own before anyone thought his friend Coleridge was an addict. And had addiction not become medicalized, perhaps, there would still have been some manner of serial literature, of which we have more than enough examples whose plots are not centrally based around addiction. Furthermore, nobody needs to know about addiction to conceive of possibility. But nineteenth-century addiction-like literary strategies, drawing from the scientific-affective associations with the then-newly established medical

¹⁵ Novelistic thinking did not just reflect a developing sense of the body's role in a wider web of commercial interconnection and narrative possibility. Novels at times influenced the trade in addictive substances: opium-trading vessels were named after novels such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Red Rover* or Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* (Fay 60).

category, *can* be shown to have attended an emphasis on investigation in various kinds of fiction and to have structured enormously popular stories of repetitive exploration. This is the central argument of the present study: addiction-like literary devices brought repetitive investigation into popular aesthetic experience, supporting especially a sense of the literary as habitual exploration—as an ongoing, intense engagement with the unknown by way of the familiar.

I want to summarize, now, the basic components of this argument, both to clarify what I have covered and to prepare the reader for the rest of this project:

- 1) Desire-like engines for moving toward the possible without wholly succumbing to the limits of actual desire, as Currie suggests, make aesthetic, literary experience of possibility accessible.
- 2) Addiction intensifies desire, and therefore addiction-like strategies support intensified literary engagement with possible worlds.
- 3) Much of what we know about addiction was established by scientific self-experimenters such as Coleridge and Freud, who exemplified connections between addictive pursuit of possibility and repetitive, experimental investigation that always drives toward possible understanding.

As addiction was revealed in all its terrible might, then, and as the addiction-like suggested tools for literary creation, many nineteenth-century writers also maintained a scientific element of reiterated, desirous experiment in their narratives of addiction, thereby concocting addiction-like narrative forms for episodic or recurring exploration of mystery. These writers did so through various literary strategies influenced by addiction

discourse, strategies for eliciting an addiction-like aesthetic response that one might also refer to as “the healthier addiction” or “the good sort of addiction.”¹⁶

My argument will unfold gradually, each chapter examining a different literary strategy refined according to the aesthetic category of addiction. Because addiction-like strategies continually manifest themselves in new forms for ongoing possibility-pursuit, this study will be constituted in large part by close reading of some of those innovations. The formal innovations I analyze include the world-shaping poetic reiterations described by Percy Shelley that bridge sameness and imaginative difference, the sprawlingly digressive but repetitive essays of De Quincey, the investigatory serial fiction of Dickens and Eliot, the double-poems of Christina Rossetti and Tennyson in which subjective and external realities merge through hungry exploration, and the mystery fiction of Stevenson in which habitual investigation occurs indolently, vicariously. An astonishing profusion of invention came from creative strategies responding to the problem of addiction. Still, the above three points can serve as touchstones for every chapter, each of which builds from my central contentions.

Our story begins here with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote at an early stage of addiction discourse but who represented to later writers (Thomas De Quincey most influentially), the literary possibilities that might be abstracted from addiction. So much

¹⁶ Orrin Wang describes a Romantic sobriety that anticipates the sort of “healthier addiction” that this study finds throughout nineteenth-century literature. Regarding Wordsworth’s poetic work and development, Wang notes that “a new cultural self-knowledge is won at the expense of a former . . . self marked by error and delusion” (19–20), a path through intoxication toward sobriety that Wang sees in “Tintern Abbey” specifically and elsewhere in Romantic thought. Thus sobriety for the Romantics, as Wang puts it, was enriched by something dizzying, by something risky, by intoxicating experience. Wang’s sense of Romantic sobriety is a cool, reflective intoxication, which he describes as a condition of both sensory connection and mental detachment, as steady historical situation and phantasmatic, tropological flux. “This historical problem of sobriety as the problem of the metaphor for the stability of metaphor, of the steady relation between figure and content, is what the circuit of ideology and figure in Romantic sobriety most forcefully and unevenly marks” (31). Wang’s study traces the literary results of this tension in Romantic sobriety, especially in terms of how history and metaphor intersect dramatically.

of Coleridge's life was ruined by substance dependence, yet his writing suggested potential to be mined from the forms and the patterns of repetitive desire. The main chapters continue after this introduction to discuss later writers who ambitiously developed new forms around narratives of addictive investigation and repetitive desire, often with reference to Coleridge or De Quincey.

Coleridge represents the foundation for my study's entire argument. The poet saw science and art linked as possibility-driven enterprises; he experimented with intoxicants; he defined the imagination as a matter of creative repetition; he was thought to attribute some of his own poetry to the drug to which he was addicted; he defined for future writers a sense of the creative mind that produces works of genius according to addiction-like thinking. Before moving on to discuss the bigger implications of this project and the course of ensuing chapters, then, I would like to consider Coleridge's contributions to the aesthetic of addiction.

Coleridge and the Addiction-Like Imagination

Throughout his life, Samuel Taylor Coleridge enthusiastically cultivated different habits. He spent much of his early acquaintanceship with William Wordsworth, for example, habitually wandering in Somerset's Quantock Hills, venturing into the woodlands around the village of Nether Stowey. This was in the 1790s, at the start of the intellectual partnership that would lead to their collaboration on the *Lyrical Ballads*.¹⁷ Wordsworth went on to idealize that productive time in *The Prelude* as a "summer, under whose indulgent skies, / Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved / Unchecked, or

¹⁷ See Adam Sissman's *The Friendship* for a recent overview of this time, to which Sissman also relates the *Prelude* quote I mention (186).

loitered mid her sylvan coombs” (XIV.397–399).¹⁸ The two of them found insight in regular loitering, in a routine lack of routine.

These loiterers were, whether they had planned to or not, participating in a tradition of Enlightenment thinkers who sought knowledge and its pleasures through repetitive digressive experience. Often such digression had occurred with even less vigorous activity than the Romantics’ wandering, and Coleridge enjoyed those more indolent habits. The talkative poet excelled conversationally, for instance, at the institution emblemizing the eighteenth-century ideal of habitual, sociable pursuit of knowledge: the coffee-house.¹⁹ The coffee-house presented a suitable locale for the routine exchange of estimable ideas and diverting gossip—a favorite channel for regular encounters with the non-routine, for fervent intellectual discourse. Joseph Addison wrote in his own outlet for eighteenth-century public intellectualism, *The Spectator* (No. 10), “I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses” (I. 311). *The Spectator* was itself written in Lloyd’s coffee-house (Russell and Tuite 6).

Coleridge, in other words, would have found habits for pleasure and learning both in the coffee-house and out in the hills, through rambling conversation or actual ambulatory rambling with a good friend. In the work of epoch-defining eighteenth-century writers whom Coleridge had read closely, too, habit arises again and again as a

¹⁸ I quote here from the 1850 edition of *The Prelude*.

¹⁹ Coleridge had at a very young age already dazzled the coffee-house world; he had gone with his uncle John Bowdon “on his frequent escapes to the taverns, and had his first unforgettable taste of the great talking-shop of London, the Johnsonian world of clubs and coffee-houses, with its last echoes of the elegant, rakish Augustan society of Steele and Addison” (Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772–1804* 24). Habermas sees such coffee-house scenes as the center of the eighteenth-century’s public sphere, noting the vigorous sharing of ideas that occurred there (32–33).

guiding principle for the acquisition of pleasure and knowledge. Edmund Burke, referring to the enjoyment of tobacco in his study of the sublime, notes that “habit alone has reconciled [the smoker’s] palate to these alien pleasures” (14). David Hume, meanwhile, argues for the epistemological validity of a habitual scientific method in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. There, Hume contends that existence is given meaningful form and made comprehensible by repetitive confirmation, through reiterated experience from which the mind can derive reasonable, reinforced connections of cause and effect; he writes that experience grants us knowledge of that which is regularly, “constantly” linked (19).²⁰ Habitual experience, the argument goes, makes possible the repetitive perception needed to understand how different things conjoin and relate reliably. Without habit, without constancy, Hume implies, the world would seem a bewildering array of novelty. He elsewhere (like Burke) argued that habit supported the socially stabilizing, moral experience of sentiment.²¹

There was a problem with that Enlightenment philosophy of habit for Coleridge, however, no matter how much pleasure he took from his routines, no matter how many discoveries he made in his habitual rambles with Wordsworth or in the coffee-house. Coleridge, we now know, eventually developed a life-threatening habit, one that worked less predictably than those that Enlightenment thinkers would have liked, and this habit

²⁰ The early English pneumatic researcher Robert Boyle is also credited as “a founder of the experimental world in which scientists now live and operate” (Shapin and Schaffer 5), and that world’s experimental method worked through regular, habitual, routine social interaction with peer researchers. Boyle’s scientific method, argue Shapin and Schaffer, worked as a way to “[crystallize] forms of social organization and as a means of regulating social interaction within the scientific community” (14). For Boyle the public scientist and experimenter in a lab, Shapin and Schaffer write, “Matters of fact were to be produced in a public space: a particular physical space in which experiments were collectively performed and directly witnessed and an abstract space constituted through virtual witnessing” (69).

²¹ Hume developed a related social sense of habit that could manage the chaos implicit in the non-habitual, the moral confusion of a universe without guarantees, of a realm that is always a matter of waiting and seeing. “The end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty,” Hume writes in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and “beget correspondent *habits* [my italics]” (14).

was observed to alter the experience of even his habitual wandering with Wordsworth. As he walked with his friend through Somersetshire, Coleridge periodically suffered from unbearable pain; the trouble was his regular consumption of opium, which led to anguish in between his doses, afflicting him with the torments of withdrawal. Wordsworth observed that “sometimes,” Coleridge would “throw himself down and writhe like a worm upon the ground” (Moorman I. 354–355; qtd Sissman 183).

And so, while some habits—wandering, conversation—helped Coleridge explore his world successfully and sociably, others on occasion reduced him to a disastrous, pitiful state. Erstwhile friend Thomas De Quincey eventually identified drug use at the core of what made Coleridge much of who he was—Coleridge’s “sufferings,” he wrote, “came from opium” (*Recollections* 97–98). Coleridge himself described opium as a “*free-agency-annihilating Poison*” (Coleridge *Letters* III. 490) and the drug habit as “a Slavery more dreadful than any man who has not felt its iron fetters eating into his very soul, can possibly imagine” (Coleridge *Letters* III.495). To Coleridge’s friend and physician James Gillman, too, the poet was physiologically addicted, though the word “addicted” was rarely applied to drug use at the time. “Neither morally nor physically was he understood,” Gillman wrote, explaining that Coleridge’s opiate troubles were not due to immorality. “He did all that in his state duty could exact” (Gillman I.173).²² Quite clearly, Romantics could and did think of habit-forming drug use much as we now think of it. Coleridge’s

²² This would oppose the view of others at the time, however; Coleridge was writing while the condition was still under construction, while routine drug use was often still seen as a vice, a bad habit. For instance, friends of Coleridge, such as Robert Southey, believed Coleridge’s drug use “constituted a gross self-indulgence which might have been abandoned, categorically, by a simple, if powerful, effort of will” (Lefebure 34).

case shows us that what we call addiction was bedeviling people before the rise of temperance movements and Victorian medicalization of drug use.²³

De Quincey, however, also went so far as to relate Coleridge's opium use to his poetic creation—in, for instance, the case of Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" (Burwick 43). Coleridge himself had promoted that sense of his poetry's foundation in opium, describing how *Kubla Khan* resulted from "an anodyne" which, as Lefebure notes, means that it was "universally accepted as opium-inspired" (27). De Quincey accordingly regarded Coleridge's habitual opium use as central to the poet's thinking. His essay on Coleridge and opium established a literary reputation that has lasted to this day; Coleridge became seen as one of the first iconically addicted artists. His habits of indolence, his poetic, philosophical, and scientific musings, would all be subsequently read in light of addiction.²⁴

Coleridge deserves some credit for manufacturing this reputation, and not just through his attribution of "Kubla Khan" to an anodyne. After the 1798 and 1800 publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, as his addiction worsened, Coleridge went on to produce writing especially devoted to the imagination's habitual pursuits. He saw intense possibility-pursuit in science as well as in literature, too. Because science related to "the passion of Hope," he wrote in a letter to Humphry Davy, it shared attributes of poetry

²³ My awareness of these telling passages from Coleridge's letters and from Gillman's work is due to Molly Lefebure's *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium*. As for the growing sense of addiction as a public and medical—not strictly moral—problem that developed in the nineteenth century, see histories of the development of temperance movements like Brian Harrison's *Drink and the Victorians*. Harrison notes, "Not until the 1860s and 1870s did American experiments convince Englishmen that habitual drunkards required voluntary or compulsory asylum treatment" (21–22). The medical sense of addiction was in process before then, however, as habitual drug use became widespread enough to motivate professional attention. And as the quotes from Coleridge's circle show, there were obviously those who thought of a drug habit as a medical problem far earlier than 1860.

²⁴ Molly Lefebure's *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* is devoted to Coleridge's addiction and defines him in terms of the condition.

(*Coleridge Letters* I.557),²⁵ and Coleridge clarified his preferred hopeful pursuits as habits—generally, he aimed for “the inculcation of the habit of seeking and finding relations in mind and nature” (Levere 28).²⁶ During and after the years of his opium addiction, in short, Coleridge was committed to writing about the power of repetitive possibility-pursuit.²⁷

²⁵ During his involvement with the Pneumatic Institute in Bristol in the 1790s, Coleridge’s interest in the possibilities suggested by self-experimentation took on a greater importance. There, along with Humphry Davy and Thomas Beddoes, Coleridge experimented with nitrous oxide and became involved in a circle of scientists with lofty, artistic aims (Davy himself was a poet). Much of the thought and interests of the Pneumatic Institute had been established earlier by Joseph Priestley, the materialist Dissenter. Priestley’s work on *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* opens with succinct statements on the mysterious, alluring possibilities of scientific research. “The greater is the circle of light,” he writes, “the greater is the boundary of the darkness” (I.xix). Coleridge wrote a poem on Priestley in 1794, one of his “Sonnets on Eminent Characters,” praising that adventure into the unknown; science, Coleridge writes, would be Priestley’s saving grace, as “Meek Nature slowly lifts her matron veil / To smile with fondness on her gazing son” (13-14). The poem describes serenity despite anticipation, or happiness found in the great possibility that becomes knowable, if never fully actual, as the veil of nature is only slowly in the process of being lifted.

²⁶ Coleridge also highly esteemed empirical scientists such as Bacon and Boyle, placing Boyle alongside Shakespeare and Milton in his pantheon of great minds in English history (*Coleridge’s Notebooks* 98).

²⁷ Richard Holmes has found in Coleridge’s discussion of “loss and failure” during his time of addiction and illness “not restriction, but release; not depression, but delight” (*Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772–1804* 302). Coleridge in the following letter uses the patterns of illness to articulate an imaginative sense that pushes beyond disease and toward knowledge. Confined physical experiences and associations lead him not to stagnant fancies, but to expansive considerations:

In my long Illness I had compelled into hours of Delight many a sleepless, painful hour of Darkness by chasing down metaphysical Game — and since then I have continued the Hunt, till I found myself unaware at the Root of Pure Mathematics — and up that tall smooth Tree, whose few poor branches are all at it’s [sic] very summit, am I climbing by pure adhesive strength of arms and thighs — still slipping down, still renewing my ascent. — You would not know me —! all sounds of similitude keep at such a distance from each other in my mind, that I have *forgotten* how to make a rhyme (*Coleridge Letters* II.389–390; qtd Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772–1804* 301).

The addict’s illness, Holmes notes, “is consistently contradicted by the excitement and spontaneity of the leaping rhythms and metaphors” (302). Coleridge finds a compensatory, imaginative power within his condition’s physical routines. He then states a basic inclination to “hunt,” to want and pursue; he finds a thirst for imaginative possibility among “sounds of similitude” echoing across distances within his yearning mind. The similitudes Coleridge observes are not proximal or well matched enough to suffocate that poetic mind. These similitudes are now so distant from one another—as the gaps between iterations in the desirous mind are so great—that Coleridge might explore enormous imaginative potential among those gaps, losing track even of rhyme. In the passage above, similitude’s association mixes with discontinuity, discontinuity that Coleridge can struggle with to make newly imagined associations. Moving from mathematics to the branches of a tree to the loftiest (possibly hallucinatory) stage of intellectual ambition, the poet has found in his indolent condition the grounds for dreaming and wanting, for considering potential while so little is actually happening.

Whether with regard to science or poetry, he had a clear theoretical interest in reiterative experience that supported ongoing awareness of possibility, and he eagerly expounded upon the associative patterns that habitual experience established. He named his son, Hartley Coleridge, after David Hartley, the philosopher who had described associative, habitually established relationships between mind and world. The fifth chapter of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is "On the law of association—Its history traced from Aristotle to Hartley," and credits Hartley as the Newton of the mind (comparing "the law of association" to gravity) (89; 92). Coleridge, however, argues that Hartley's association (by which mind and world neatly harmonize through chains of repeatedly confirmed, linked relationship) does not go far enough in examining the all-powerful role of the desirous individual (*Biographia Literaria* [hereafter *BL*] 106–117). Coleridge describes instead an imaginative individual as a creature of active repetitions: "The primary IMAGINATION," Coleridge writes, "I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*BL* 304). Repetitions, Coleridge held, linked the mind with infinity, continually making possible the conscious perception and creative articulation of something more.

This Coleridgean imagination differs from the consciousness understood by Hartley's followers, who would have "consciousness considered as a *result*, as a *tune*, the common product of the breeze and the harp" (*BL* 117). To Coleridge, the Hartleyan method did have the benefit of harmony; it explained at least some formal link between mind and world—that of vibrations, from stimulus to memory to thought. But Coleridge held that the mind also *creates* forms out of its portion of infinity, out of the otherness

from which and to which its ongoing repetitions spring. This creative force is, as Coleridge describes it, a literary capability supported by repetitive movement toward more and more; by repeating out into infinity, Coleridge's imagination forges links between familiarity and the infinite. The poet's situation as a known addict would make it possible for De Quincey and others after to regard such ideas about strong, habitual repetitions of possibility-pursuit as addiction-like.

Coleridge never claimed that his theories about imagination were theories of an addict-like imagination, and he did not have access to the widely accepted medical sense of addiction that later nineteenth-century writers would have. Though he stated that he was enslaved by opium—though he plainly saw himself to be what we would describe as addicted—at the time his habit worsened (between 1801 and 1806) opiate habituation among many was still “not regarded as dangerous . . . indeed habituation was widely thought to make opium safer” (Vickers 92–93). Coleridge thought, rather, in ways that were during his lifetime just *starting* to be considered in terms similar to terms of addiction. With Thomas Trotter's dissertation on inebriety, from 1788, British medical science was beginning to cite habitual intoxication as a serious problem worthy of sustained attention.²⁸ It would take some time for that serious consideration to become institutionally accepted, to become widely understood as medical truth and to aid influential temperance movements.²⁹ Still, Coleridge makes an important introductory figure in this study because in the eyes of his emulator De Quincey, he was a poetic

²⁸ “Hinc in scriptis de re medica ebrietatem inter causas morborum brevissime memoratam invenimus, dum modus agendi penitus notitiam effugit,” notes Trotter, before continuing with his dissertation that corrected that oversight. [Translation: “So in medical writing, we find drunkenness too briefly mentioned among the causes of morbidity, while its actions escape notice.”] The Latin is from Trotter's *Dissertatio Medica Inauguralis, Quaedam De Ebrietate, eiusque Effectibus in Corpus Humanum Complectens*.

²⁹ Temperance movements “distinct from previous” (mostly religious) “attacks on drunkenness” emerged in Britain in the 1820s, though these typically remained at least partly religious (Harrison 90–91).

genius shaped by his habit-forming drug use. The forms and the patterns of addiction (not exclusively addiction itself) were thereafter used by De Quincey and others as tools for exploring a related, Coleridgean interconnection between sameness and otherness.³⁰

There is abundant evidence for this sense of addiction-like, Coleridgean aesthetic experience in De Quincey's work. De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* contains, for instance, a passage on endlessly replicating staircases that draws from both Coleridge's influence and the addictive patterns associated with the poet. The staircases in question are the famous, endlessly replicating ones portrayed by the artist Giovanni Piranesi, and De Quincey describes them in similarly repetitive terms to illustrate the opium eater's mindset.³¹ Yet De Quincey had not actually seen the image himself. He used Coleridge's description of the Piranesi image, a description that Coleridge claimed had related to his own sick "visions." Thus, while De Quincey used an aesthetic strategy of addiction-like, digressive repetition to structure his prose, he consciously did so by copying Coleridgean repetitive experience (the poet's visions of Piranesi's endless staircase) in order to portray repetitiously encountered possibility.

Certainly addiction hindered those who suffered from it. The opium habit sent Coleridge, for example, into long periods of anguish. But many of those who reflected on addiction's patterns also found an approach for creating intensely repetitive literary exploration. Still, literary scholars in recent decades have examined how the emergence of addiction discourse in the nineteenth century policed desires;³² Clifford Siskin, for

³⁰ Alethea Hayter in *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* gives an overview of the relationship between intoxication and the age's poetry, as does M.H. Abrams in *The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Work of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge*.

³¹ Specifically, De Quincey uses repetitive imperative verbs: "follow the stairs. . . you perceive it . . . you suppose . . . raise your eyes, and behold . . . elevate your eye" (78).

³² Important studies on the social discipline accompanying the rise of addiction discourse in the nineteenth century include Susan Zieger's *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century*

instance, writes that “discourse of addiction . . . inscribed upon the culture an inherently disciplinary model” (190). In this study, I seek to account for the literary invention manifestly achieved by writers using the *patterns* of addiction. Those patterns, once put into writing, whether deployed in serial narratives of addicts or periodical essays about them, I term “addiction-like,” in order to distinguish them from actual addictions that limit will. From Thomas De Quincey to Christina Rossetti to Robert Louis Stevenson, the writers covered in the following pages all saw imaginative possibility flourish amid the constraints of repetitive existence, and they subsequently fashioned texts that repetitively charted newly imagined worlds of intense possibility.³³

Theoretical Background and Implications:

New Formalism, Speculative Materialism, and Affective Cognition

With this study, I hope to suggest pathways toward better understanding of a major aesthetic category, that category’s history, and the manner of concocting related aesthetic strategies with regard to sensed possibilities. But my emphasis on aesthetic form as both historical artifact and structure for lived experience means that the following pages also participate in a scholarly discussion about formalism: specifically, in the discussion on form’s provenance and functions. As mentioned, the following chapters describe aesthetic forms emerging from specific historical and material contexts of addiction discourse, and I also examine how such forms generate particular effects (the

British and American Literature; Lawrence Driscoll’s *Reconsidering Drugs: Mapping Victorian and Modern Drug Discourses*; and Clifford Siskin’s *Historicity of Romantic Discourse*. One foundational text for this sense of disciplinarian medical authority is Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

³³ Other, twentieth-century senses of possibility discovered in constraints have reflected the addiction aesthetic’s discoveries; examples of this can be found in the work of the Oulipo, the literary society dedicated to creative potential that comes from adhering to structural limits. See Daniel Levin Becker’s *Many Subtle Channels: In Praise of Potential Literature*.

effects of addiction-like reading). A connection between those two aspects of literary form—the historical contexts of form and the work done by form—would suggest a connection between materiality, history, and imaginative experience, and such a connection seems consistently revealed by addiction literature.

Two ways that scholars have tended to think of literary form—as a reflection of its historical context or as a tool for creation of particular experiences—have often existed separately. Marjorie Levinson has summarized these two separated positions of contemporary formalist critics as “activist” criticism (which examines how literary forms derive from historical context) and “normative” criticism (which describes particular “cognitive and affective” norms in the aesthetic) (559). My study, meanwhile, bridges the gap between activist and normative formalism, examining formal invention in light of material, historical contexts (the rise of addiction discourse) while also taking into account the cognitive and affective effects of those forms (the suggestions of addiction-like experience of repetitive possibility-pursuit found in major addiction texts). The formal developments in the following chapters, I will show, all reflected historically specific and medically specific senses of actuality and its potential, but the result was often inventive exploration of possibility.

Attention to possibility and modality, specifically, helps elucidate this link between form’s background and form’s effects. The case of addiction literature shows how forms develop in terms of historically (and medically) delimited possibilities. And as historical context and medical context alike produced different modalities—different orientations to possibility—writers, I argue, found resources to produce different formal inventions. Those formal inventions, *as inventions* (that is, as things that did not exist

before writers produced them), themselves generated and represented new experiences of possibility, with attendant new ways of thinking and feeling about possibility. Addiction, by intensifying a sense of possibility and by being itself so formally repetitive, has continued to inform a kind of literary experience in which historically and medically specific orientation to possibility sustains new artistic forms, forms that themselves sustain addiction-like experience of intense pursuit of possibility.

In addition to possible-worlds theory's attention to modality, two additional theoretical positions have aided my study of how possibility is accessed from material actuality for the creation of literary realms that provide ongoing experiences of possibilities. The first is the ecocritical, materialist, or speculative-realist argument that possibilities registered for narrative-making inhere in material experience (this corresponds, roughly, with the "activist" formalism characterizing my study). The second theoretical view relevant to my project is that of affect theorists, who describe desirous, embodied emotional senses that shape thought about the world's possibilities (this corresponds, roughly, with the "normative" formalism characterizing my study). Studies of affect remind us that senses of the world are so often approached through feeling with some bodily, material ramification. Similarly, the addiction texts covered here give us possible worlds of intensely pursued mystery and correspondingly intensified, affective compulsions toward possibility in their represented worlds. Both theoretical frameworks—that of materialism and affect theory—concern narratable possibility humans locate in physical actuality. Both help us understand how aesthetic forms engage a sense of possibilities in phenomena.

Materialist scholars have examined, for example, the commercial variety of material possibility that nineteenth-century writers exploited.³⁴ Elaine Freedgood has described how “the literal material qualities of things,” frequently commodified, are put to use in Victorian novels with regard to their politically loaded “large, historically enriched figural possibilities” (28). Ecocritics have pointed out how commercial consumption in general demonstrated to Romantics an expanse of possibilities that we might pursue in the material world: Timothy Morton describes ways in which widespread consumerism in the context of a global empire, for instance, contributed to Romantic literary attitudes toward a new global space;³⁵ Lawrence Buell, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, has drawn from Thoreau especially while outlining environmental criticism’s role in addressing developments in global versus regional spatial coordinates in a world of global commerce.³⁶ For both Buell and Morton, writers in the Romantic or Transcendentalist tradition appear especially aware of perplexing new spaces and places developed through the processes of commerce and consumption, and Freedgood argues that Victorian texts were inflected by the forces of material consumption that shape a social order.³⁷ Each of these critics observes that nineteenth-

³⁴ Work by scholars of Victorian material culture has further clarified how writers addressed consumption loaded with social meaning. I am referring to studies such as *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels* by Suzanne Daly and *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* by Talia Schaffer.

³⁵ “Environmental Romanticism argues that globalization has undermined any coherent sense of place” (Morton, *Ecology without Nature* 84).

³⁶ “Thoreau’s masterpiece was a local book addressed in the first instance to a regional readership . . . that spends much more time analogizing between its place and other landscapes and cultures around the world” (Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism* 83).

³⁷ The literary tradition I discuss spans the divide between Romanticism and Victorianism because addiction discourse developed throughout the nineteenth century. Studies of the relationship between the two eras often view Victorianism as something separate, as a reaction to Romanticism’s excessive desires—examples of such arguments can be found in Joel Faflak and Julia Wright’s edited collection, *Nervous Reactions: Victorian Recollections of Romanticism*. While such a reaction no doubt existed (see any number of Victorian novels in which unruly individuals become chastened), Victorian literary production also intensified the Romantic sense of potent, desirous habits. When reading with attention to

century writers accessed some manner of worldly possibility sensed and exploited in materiality and in turn engaged greater conversations about the state of their world.

In writer after writer examined in this study, I have found a related fascination with the production of realms through intensified consumerist tendencies registered in terms of addiction discourse.³⁸ The writers who patterned their texts after addiction forged literature that shared addictive consumption's world-shaping orientation to possibility, without addictive consumption's chemical, immediate risks.³⁹ Writers of nineteenth-century addiction texts could thus deal with historically specific material circumstances while producing imaginative, speculative realms. Speculative realists have their own explanation for such simultaneously imaginative and material existences, an explanation that resonates with my argument about producers of addiction-like literature;⁴⁰ Ian Bogost has argued that "[it] is ultimately impossible for one thing to understand the experience of another, but we can speculate about the withdrawn, inner experience of things based on a combination of evidence—the exhaust they leave behind—and poetics—the speculative work we do to characterize that experience." In the eyes of such a speculative realist, we spend our material lives with regard to possible worlds, always thinking about an unattainable something when we consider materiality.

A condition *like* addiction (again: not literal addiction) that inclines us further toward

addiction tropes, then, similarities often seem greater than the differences between Victorian and Romantic literature; in both De Quincey's and Robert Louis Stevenson's writings on intoxicating habits we find a similar orientation toward exploration via repetitive consumption.

³⁸ For an extended analysis of the capitalist production of space, see Henri Lefebvre's study of the subject.

³⁹ Thus, while I draw evidence from historical accounts that consider Romantic literature and its derivatives' use of addiction tropes for ideologically interested definitions of individual desires (and consequently for forcefully warping the actual, social world), I mainly consider moments when such addiction tropes were used consciously to produce imagined narrative worlds. I am, still, indebted to Clifford Siskin for his overview of the rise of addiction discourse during the Romantic era, and Jerome McGann's study of *The Romantic Ideology* has also been helpful in its exploration of how an ideology of individual growth came to define the age's literature, emphasizing the necessary link between Romantic imagination and historical context.

⁴⁰ See especially Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*.

material possibility, then, offers strategies for recognizing more profoundly that same speculative existence.

One additional implication of this project's central argument—the argument that nineteenth-century writers forged literary worlds of intensified possibility using patterns similar to those found in material addiction—is precisely this entanglement of affective, aesthetic experience with investigatory quest into the unknown. The possible worlds of addiction-like literature are worlds for affectively vivid exploration (see the thrilling, tormenting labyrinths and mazes in De Quincey's work). That entanglement of feeling and learning through repetitive experience is nothing new. Something emotionally compels the steady procession that Thomas Kuhn observes running through scientific paradigms, for instance, and desirous feeling seems suggested by much scientific experimentation that moves endlessly toward falsifiability (as Karl Popper describes it). The paradigms Kuhn tells of in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* survive according to a repetitive and *wishful* movement toward the possible: “The success of a paradigm,” writes Kuhn, “is at the start largely a promise of success discoverable in selected and still incomplete examples” (23–24). Scientists receive a promise—let us say, for instance, of teleportation or intergalactic travel—and then pursue that promise of success hopefully. That Kuhnian advancement of science would typically rely on some degree of feeling, some speculative, hopeful (optative) mood.

Addicted and addict-like scientists in the nineteenth-century underscored that relationship between science and feeling. In the later half of the century, as I have mentioned, Freud demonstrated confusion between his own enjoyed, addictive pursuits and scientific experiment while defending his advocacy of cocaine as a treatment for

morphine addiction in an essay on “Craving for and Fear of Cocaine.”⁴¹ His habitual use of cocaine blurred the difference between physician, scientist, and patient; the medical application of a drug and the scientific observation of repeatable phenomena were in Freud’s case also the sickness of addiction. Even when Freud would deny the extent of cocaine’s addictive properties, he discussed his own experimental “regular use” of the drug “over long periods”—a use he enjoyed quite enthusiastically, thereby fusing scientific method and aesthetic pleasure (*Cocaine Papers* 173).

Theresa Brennan describes affect in particular as always a self-interested way of investigating the world; she writes that it “carries a message of self-interest along with the attention it rides on” (41). Addiction, a matter of both repetitive experiment and affect regulation, clarifies (because it intensifies) the affectively compelling element of studious attention to the still-to-be-encountered.⁴² All this might start to resemble the death drive as described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud outlines the compulsion to repeat that moves us, feelingly, toward something always beyond repetition. Yet when reviewing the addiction-like techniques in Victorian writing, we see more than just paths to mental blankness; we see a formal, repetitive union between science and the arts, between experiment and aesthetics, and between cognition and feeling. Ruth Leys has criticized the relatively recent turn to affect in the humanities as a turn away from attention toward cognition, signification, and the ideologies that work through those means (437). A more nuanced take, she argues, relies upon “thick descriptions of life experiences of the kind that are familiar to anthropologists and novelists” (471). The

⁴¹ In the *Cocaine Papers*, Freud writes, “I have had broad experience with the regular use of cocaine over long periods of time by persons who were not morphine addicts, and have taken the drug myself for some months” (173).

⁴² See, for one of many studies on addiction and affect regulation, Timothy Carmody’s “Affect Regulation, Tobacco Addiction, and Smoking Cessation.”

addiction-like strategies of nineteenth-century writers, I argue, provided just that, weaving together affective desire with knowledge-acquisition. Such strategies show material existence, speculation, and feeling joining in the experience of intensified possibility.

The addiction aesthetic's adventurous union of feeling and thinking can help explain why calling something like *Breaking Bad* "addictive" does not disparage it. Instead, we can regard so-called addictive forms such as streaming TV and videogames just as nineteenth-century readers thought of serial novels: as repetitive experiences that sustain an ongoing sense of possibility, continually taking the audience toward strangeness and new understanding in realms of intense mystery. When encountering those literary worlds, so modally oriented toward possibility, strangeness, or otherness in repetitive language, we stand to learn a great deal from close attention to the formal devices and stylistic patterns by which their modal orientations are expressed. Frederic Bogel argues for similar formal attention that specifically produces "apprehension of otherness" in texts (15), and some manner of otherness—the speculative, the unattained, the always merely wanted, the possible—is precisely what addiction literature directs itself toward most intensely.

Project Overview

In my next chapter, I consider *The Cenci*, Percy Shelley's Gothic tragedy, in light of Shelley's early essays on diet, in which he registered concern with the world-changing potency of alcohol habits. The characters in Shelley's play are terrorized by the brutal Count Cenci, whose predation is often preceded by and articulated with regard to his

drinking. Shelley himself was committed to abstention from alcohol, and in his writings on vegetarianism he was clear about the dangers he saw in habitual alcohol use: he argued that tyranny and violence stemmed directly from habits of excess and alcohol consumption, and he was an early proponent of temperance in light of developing medical understandings of alcohol habit. Yet in his later essays, Shelley also describes poetic achievement and understanding in terms very much like those he used to describe alcohol habit—in terms of habits that alter the shape of the world. Habitual intoxication, then, was an aesthetic and ethical problem that Shelley needed to address, and he did so in both his essays and *The Cenci*. Beatrice, Count Cenci's daughter who brings the Count to justice, speaks of a better set of patterns, sympathetic patterns that build knowledge of others and that can create a better world than the addict's. This, I argue, foreshadows the patterns used by writers following the Romantics—those literary patterns that support reflective thought about difference rather than, in the manner of literal drug addiction, deathly, mindless pursuit. Shelley, I contend, arrived at a belief in the possible-world-creating and world-enhancing power of such salutary habits after first contemplating the brutal world-making power of addictive habits. In the poetic repetitions of *The Cenci*'s dialogue, Shelley evokes both kinds of habits and shows how their different patterns structure differently shaped and known worlds: an enclosed realm in Count Cenci's case and an expansive and imaginatively liberating one in Beatrice's, which models the efficaciousness of the merely addiction-like for future construction of possible worlds and for consideration of broader variety.

Thomas De Quincey, in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, recounts a harmful substance habit as well, but he also connects the condition more directly to his

personal aesthetic achievements. The relationship between actual addiction and addiction-like literary strategies thus becomes even closer; De Quincey more firmly established a basis for addiction-like literature of ongoing consideration of possibility built around stories of actual addiction. In chapter three, I examine how De Quincey in his *Confessions* emphasizes investigative and aesthetic properties of addiction and then exhibits the creative potential of such compulsive, investigative aesthetic pursuit. In the *Confessions*, De Quincey describes his younger self's addicted behavior and employs addiction's patterns to shape and evoke imagined worlds—such as the Piranesi labyrinth he describes, a place for expansive wandering and repetitive grasping for more (if any writer in this study comes close to erasing distinctions between addiction and the addiction-like, even if momentarily, it is De Quincey). This chapter thus concerns the literary realms of intense possibility patterned after De Quincey's drug habit. Here, I consider how drug habits were approached as a danger, much as Shelley took alcohol use to be, but as a danger with at least some formal properties to be extracted and repurposed for literary benefit.

Poets of the Victorian era further developed an aesthetic experience of vexed interrelationship between self and other through the conflicted “double poem” (as Isobel Armstrong has described it). Chapter four deals with two representative poets of this contradiction-conveying form: Alfred Tennyson and Christina Rossetti. Both wrote poetry constituted of patterns that we might normally associate with ordered thinking—such as the scientific patterns of Tennyson's work or the religious patterns of Rossetti's. Both, however, also located creative, productive potential in ongoing patterns that always drive toward more, and both figured patterned pursuits as addiction-like. Tennyson's and

Rossetti's poems, I argue, present unhealthy thinking that still proves aesthetically and intellectually productive. In Tennyson's case, I will consider this addiction-like poetry as it appears especially in "The Lotos-Eaters," and in Rossetti's, I examine the exploratory but troublingly toxic habits in her "Goblin Market."

Chapter five begins a consideration of the Victorian novel and the central role addicts play as knowers and participants in the plots of two major texts: Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Both novels involve at least one plot-compelling opium-user—*Bleak House*'s Nemo (in a story populated by other habitual consumers of intoxicants) and *Middlemarch*'s recovered opium-experimenter, Will Ladislaw. Both novels have passages in which addiction and addiction-like thinking structure a search for knowledge mixed with aesthetic enjoyment. In either case, that pursuit replicates the patterns of addiction in the novel itself, shaping an episodically articulated novelistic world of labyrinthine places there to be pondered endlessly. It was in the same mid-Victorian period that Charles Darwin undertook his own studies of habit's role in a fluidly evolving kind of ecological habitation (studies that would have particular relevance for Eliot), and the epigraph to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* itself compares scientific searching to habitual intoxication.⁴³ In Eliot's novel especially, I argue, a related Darwinian experience and understanding is achieved by the sober addict, the recovered Will Ladislaw.

Chapter six considers one further formal discovery made with regard to addiction, one additional literary payoff of an intense reliance on optative language of addictively constant wishing. The literary payoff: plots of indolent, vicarious pursuit strongly

⁴³ Quoting Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Darwin's epigraph reads: "let no man out of a weak conceit of sobriety . . . think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works" (*Origins* 89).

suggestive of cinema. Drug habits in the nineteenth century were frequently understood to relate to indolence, yet a drug habit also meant that one would have a constant wish to pursue a specific, desired drug, as well. A narrative of vicarious movement—a story carried out optatively—could thus reflect narrative reliance on addiction. The sixth chapter centers on Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which tells of characters who investigate lazily while habitually drinking wine or experimenting with a drink compared to alcohol; they are constantly wandering sluggishly, often exploring through mediation, whether in the case of Jekyll adventuring about through the avatar of Hyde or the lawyer Utterson’s tendency to investigate by way of letters and gossip. Both bibulous characters, Jekyll and Utterson, pursue from a distance, optatively and vicariously. Stevenson describes this vicarious movement in cinematic terms, suggesting the future of repetitively consumed aesthetic experience.

These chapters by no means cover the whole history of the addiction aesthetic. There are major nineteenth-century addiction-like writings that do not have chapters devoted to them, such as Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories and Edgar Allan Poe’s entire body of work. Both of those, however, can be understood through the central terms of my study. The association of pleasurable investigation with addiction in terms of episodic experience is perhaps most enduringly expressed in Conan Doyle’s stories about his great detective; in *The Sign of Four*, Holmes himself relates his drug habits to investigation, both of which give him “mental exaltation” (124). His investigations, accordingly, take on a repetitive episodic form much like his drug use. Still earlier than Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe created his own thrilling fictions around seekers with a proclivity for addictive consumption, such as the narrator of “The Purloined Letter,”

whose inquisitive contemplation begins the story along with the enjoyment of “a meerschau” (208). Poe and Conan Doyle both had major characters drawn to opium, and both had read much De Quincey. They thrived within the tradition discussed in the following pages. Yet I mention them only in passing, first because an adequate study of Poe’s intricate use of addiction-like strategies would necessitate at least a whole book, and second because Conan Doyle’s use of addiction-like, episodic form for narratives of investigation intensifies formal strategies already covered in my chapters on earlier writers such as Stevenson and Dickens. In my effort to avoid redundancy, I have included Sherlock Holmes as a reference point without giving him his own chapter. More work on the role of addiction in the writings of Poe and Conan Doyle surely must be done, but they remain beyond the scope of the present project to identify and examine the literary origins and functions of the aesthetic of addiction.

Distinction between Literal Addiction and the Aesthetic of Addiction

A series of warnings, clarifications, and distinctions seems necessary, especially when writing about ideas drawn from a condition that destroys lives. First—I repeat for emphasis—the medical problem of addiction is *not* the hero of this study. Quite the opposite. The writers whose work I examine all saw addiction as a central problem of their age, and they responded to its threat through literature that drew from addiction’s great power and patterns but could not succumb to its physiological will-control. Among other things, such an approach is in keeping with the enduring strategy of replacing one addiction with another set of compelling patterns—nicotine gum for tobacco, AA mantras and ritual meetings for alcohol, methadone for heroin. I am not, however, presenting the

authors here—except for Percy Shelley—as temperance writers, and I generally seek to avoid making too many claims about their intentions, which were varied and inconsistent. What remains consistent among the writers in this study is simply their engagement with addiction for aesthetic strategies related to ongoing pursuit of possibility.

Today, works that suit the aesthetic of addiction do not *need* to deal with addiction as a subject matter. But among the precursors to such contemporary serial amusements we find a preponderance of addicted characters and narratives of addictive pursuit of knowledge. The iconic, original, most widely read mystery stories—indeed, some of the most widely read, thought-to-be-addictive fictions of the Victorian era—were structured around addicted investigators.⁴⁴ The aesthetic of addiction we now live with thus developed through texts that actually narrated substance dependence in stories of repetitive possibility-pursuit.

But just as not every addictive story deals with substance dependence, not every story about addiction applies so intensely aesthetic strategies of addiction as I have defined them, which require attention to the addiction-like processes of investigation through reiterated experiment. Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* and Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, for example, both have narratives structured around addicted central characters, but in both cases the patterns stemming from addiction do not work so strongly as repetitions in pursuit of understanding—the addict's repetitions in these two books are life-destroying, and few addiction-like habits of investigation arise to overcome literal addiction in either text. Still, temperance novels and works such as Brontë's and Hardy's contributed to the development of the aesthetic of addiction first by

⁴⁴ To take one of many examples: Henry Mansel in *The Quarterly Review* bemoaned the addictive, “ravenous appetite” (502) fed by sensation fiction, of which Dickens was, Mansel thought, a particularly effective producer.

demonstrating the plot-causing capability of addictive desire and second by demonstrating the dangers of actual addiction, dangers that other writers opposed or subordinated to the more creative powers of the addiction-like.

In the world outside this dissertation, that addiction-like strategy is so commonly used, the word “addictive” deployed in such a cliché manner, that I would blame no reader who finds my own discussion of the word irritating.⁴⁵ But I do not mean to extend the cliché’s dominion, nor do I aim to diagnose fictional characters. I seek only to understand how the popular—perhaps clichéd—aesthetic of addiction works, what it offers us, and how it derived from the actual, literal experience of substance dependence. To do so, I will occasionally refer to the medical sense of addiction as substance dependence, which is what I mean by “literal addiction” (I do not describe habits of gambling, sex, junk food, or exercise as literal addictions, whether or not they might be—nor do I claim that the aesthetic of addiction is a literal, physiological dependence; by

⁴⁵ We continue to live with our own versions of an aesthetic of addiction, with our own forms for sustaining aesthetic habits. Novels, films, television shows, and videogames have persisted in dealing with addicted characters engaged in episodic plots about the incessant hunt for possibility. David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, an epic novel about drug addiction in a speculative reality, places addiction at the center of a culture haunted by the need for entertainment that never satisfies completely, unless it kills or otherwise incapacitates its victims [Wallace, incidentally, wrote his undergraduate thesis at Amherst College on modal logic, and that thesis is now published as *Fate, Time, and Language: An Essay on Free Will* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010)]. More addiction-narrative examples are probably unnecessary for the reader conversant in twentieth-century popular culture; again and again, artists have turned to the topic of addiction when exploring the issue of wanting and thinking in ways that cannot ever be satisfied. The different levels of mediation that feed this hunger in *Infinite Jest*—videogames, televideo avatars, film cartridges, drugs themselves—are familiar parts of the general postmodern problem of repetitive signification without a grounded center. *Infinite Jest* presents the healing capacities of cliché, of Alcoholics Anonymous with its mantras and patterns (Wallace’s novel also explicitly promotes Alcoholics Anonymous in the fine print by the copyright information), as corrective forces opposed to the limiting self-focus of real addiction. This sort of repetitive, addiction-like experience is held to bear more salutary potential than the aesthetic categories noted by Sianne Ngai in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. For Ngai, the zany, the cute, and the interesting represent experience of “hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism” (1). The addiction-like as I am defining it, however, offers sober exploration of possibility through reiterations—it offers ways out of the patterns Ngai notes in the other categories, and it does so by providing patterns that broaden thought about possibility.

“literal addiction” I stick to the terms of medical discourse over the past two centuries that has most commonly explained addiction as a dependence on substances such as alcohol, nicotine, opium, and caffeine). I make no strong differentiation between different kinds of substance dependence, however; addiction based on substance dependence is, regardless of substance, a matter of regulated affect toward a desired substance, and that affect regulation remains similar (though with obvious and varying degrees of intensity) whether the drug is opium, alcohol, or nicotine. The drugs have different effects, and the intensity of addictions varies by substance, but the basic mechanism of addiction persists. My examples of addictive substances in this study thus will range from tobacco to alcohol to opium, all habit-forming substances that lead to affect regulation, and in the nineteenth century, as I will show, the addictive effects of that range of substances were already thought to be strongly related. To this day, in fact, dependence on different substances is understood as basically the same condition: “The symptoms of Dependence,” notes the *DSM-IV*, “are similar across the various categories of substances” (176). And that dependence, whatever the substance, has set the patterns for aesthetic strategies of addiction that originated when writers first built texts around habitual consumption of a variety of drugs.

De Quincey saw substance dependence set those patterns quite clearly in his own case and in Coleridge’s, and writers after De Quincey would continue to use such addiction-like strategies to create their own texts of repetitive investigations. Of the writers who did so, once more, almost all represented *actual* substance dependence as a great peril while posing the *addiction-like* as a relatively beneficial experience (producing exploratory awareness). And so, while actual addiction has represented much of what

remains harmful in modern approaches to otherness—such as mindless consumerism’s unhealthy appetites—*addiction-like* work, such as Coleridge’s writing in De Quincey’s view, came to offer benefits like awareness of difference tied to sameness, a sense of ceaseless exploration and intellectual curiosity linked to personal sensations and feelings, and creative engagement with the strangeness persisting in habitual life. This was a new kind of aesthetic experience, departing from the more simply organized aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful.⁴⁶ Addiction-like experiences are rather like that which an especially insightful addict described as “uncanny,” bridging the familiar with the unfamiliar, and they can be found in great abundance today in a variety of forms and media.

No matter the medium, however, addiction-like experience as I have defined it remains the same: it intensifies a union between affect and speculation while representing a link between the repetitively quotidian and speculative possibility. This is an aesthetic experience that offers us insight into how we imagine, think, and create by sensing in material circumstances an ever-present suggestion of something else.

Terms and Definitions

The addiction aesthetic (also referred to herein as the addiction-like): This is the chief subject of my study, and I explore this aesthetic particularly as it developed through

⁴⁶ Prior to addiction’s establishment (as a medical problem and as an aesthetic), eighteenth-century aesthetic categories of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque had made distinctions between vast sublimity and picturesque smallness (for an overview, see Walter John Hipple Jr.’s *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory*). But, I argue, De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and other addiction texts would demonstrate how something as small and mundane as consumption patterns might prompt imaginative digressions of the grandest scale.

literature. The addiction aesthetic is one in which we repeatedly and intensely consider the possible, often through art or narrative, without becoming physiologically dependent or focused on a single substance. This intensely repetitive movement toward something novel thus lacks the gravest risks of literal addiction and contains real potential for invention. In the nineteenth century, such addiction-like experience was often articulated with regard to other known, intensely repetitive movements toward novelty, such as scientific experiment and investigation, and narratives of addiction often treated addicts or the addict-like as investigators who lived and thought extremely repetitively. Developments within this aesthetic category include, most famously, serial mystery fiction.

Substance dependence (also known as literal addiction): This denotes physical dependency on a substance, which involves never-satisfied, ongoing pursuit of that substance. That pursuit keeps the addict in a condition of constantly wanting and intensely considering possibility (however limited the focus of that consideration might be).

Possible world: a set of linked possibilities, often conceived of as one explores our actual world. Fiction works as one such possible world, forged by desire-like creativity, and its fictionality can be intensified through the sense of possibility attained by addiction-like strategies.

CHAPTER 2

SHELLEY, ALCOHOL, AND THE “WORLD WE MAKE”: PLACE-MAKING HABITS IN *THE CENCI*

Beginning in 1818, Percy Shelley’s travels through Italy brought him again and again to the story of Beatrice Cenci, the sixteenth-century Italian aristocrat who was executed for killing her abusive father. In Livorno, Shelley read an account of Beatrice; in Rome, he saw the supposed portrait of her that had been attributed to Guido Reni; later, he strolled through “the grim buildings of the Palazzo Cenci down by the Tiber Island, with its iron-fenced windows and its small dim courtyard” (Holmes 513). Repeated encounters with Beatrice’s story—through text, painting, and architecture—had patterned Shelley’s Italy, and in his tragedy *The Cenci*, Shelley would likewise show habit’s patterns shaping the places experienced by his characters.

This chapter argues, first, that engagement with early nineteenth-century discourse on intemperate habits had prepared Shelley to reflect on how habit’s patterns shape the world we experience, and, second, that *The Cenci* displays Shelley’s view of aesthetic patterns as a world-shaping force that shares habit’s potency. After composing *The Cenci*, Shelley explicitly defined habit as poetic in his *Defence of Poetry*, where he writes that habits—behavioral recurrences—and poetry—artful linguistic recurrence—are synonymous (513).⁴⁷ Both habit and poetry, as Shelley describes them, provide reiterations by which we give formal shape to our world. He had earlier described that function of dietary habit in “A Vindication of Natural Diet,” where he contends that

⁴⁷ References to essays and poetry by Shelley are, unless otherwise noted, from *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

habitual alcohol use creates oppressive places (82);⁴⁸ he suggests thoughtful poetry's patterns as a corrective response to those problems of material excess in the *Defence of Poetry* (531). Poetry, for Shelley in the *Defence*, serves as a tool by which a writer "creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration" (533); this occurs through poetry's own patterns or "recurrence" that tend to "produce in the mind an habit of order and harmony" (534). In *The Cenci*, Shelley similarly poses Beatrice's thoughtfully poetic patterns, through which she speaks of a harmoniously ordered world, against the annihilating and imprisoning reiterations of a habitual predator and sickly, intemperate consumer, her father.

The argument that Beatrice effectively, radically opposes Count Cenci departs from a tradition of criticism that holds, as Jerrold Hogle has argued, that Beatrice's retributive violence tragically reflects Count Cenci's violence. While Beatrice is indeed heroic in her stance against her tormenter, Hogle notes, "she is also 'tragic' in showing how much the logic she assaults has become so thoroughly her own" (693). Undeniably, Beatrice has been trapped in the world ruled by her father, imprisoned in his violent scheme, and her own rebellion does participate in that world's brutality: she directs her father's slaying by intimidating her henchmen (IV.iii.22–36). She is a tragic heroine, flawed and troubled, and it is precisely that miserable, tragic element that Shelley sought to impart: "Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes," he writes in *The Cenci*'s preface. "If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character" (142). While her conflict with

⁴⁸ Here Shelley describes how alcohol consumption debases populations, and he specifically uses the example of Paris under Robespierre. From *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 1, ed. E.B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 77–91).

her father proves disastrous, then, Beatrice is also intended to evoke tragedy's emotional response of pity in her audience, because the destruction of her very being is so distressing. This brings us, however, to one reason why Beatrice cannot be said to share entirely the logic of Count Cenci: while the Count gives himself over to intemperate habits and tyrannical violence, Beatrice consciously calls for a repetitive sympathetic response, "constant" love, while speaking forth patterns that would shape a more caring world (V.iv.146–149). She asks for others to experience sympathy, pity, and love when thinking of her story: in effect, then, she authors her own tragedy, and she calls for the opposite of the patterned, toxic behavior represented by the tyrant.

Reading *The Cenci* with attention to its different kinds of constancy and habit does more than reveal the stark differences between its two main characters. We can also see how Shelley's characterization of Count Cenci in terms of toxic habits—anticipating addiction discourse of the later nineteenth century—dramatizes a kind of villainy Shelley had pondered in earlier work on consumption and clarifies the radically creative departure from damaging material habits that Shelley would call for elsewhere. In "A Vindication of Natural Diet," Shelley had argued that Parisians had submitted to Robespierre's brutality under the influence of their own intoxicating drinks (82). Shelley's Cenci—an avowed sadist who at "sight of agony" feels a "sense of joy" and "no remorse" (I.i.82-84)—proves likewise to produce an especially destructive worldly scheme when influenced by intemperate habits. Those sickly material habits, I will show, extend Cenci's evil into repetitively patterned, worldly form while Beatrice, heroically resistant, speaks forth different patterns of sympathy through which she calls for a better future.

These two characters, articulating different kinds of recurrences, evoke differently patterned areas—an actual dungeon in Count Cenci’s case and an imagined, expansive realm in Beatrice’s. Two senses of place are at issue in *The Cenci*, then: one is a socially ordered physical realm that the tyrannical Cenci devises, and the other is the largely imagined one that his daughter Beatrice speaks into being so that it may someday become actual. Cenci, first, delights in ruining lives and creating entrapping circumstances for his victims as a matter of routine, of habit, and in the most physiological terms; he says that he “rarely” kills a victim in order to maintain a suffering body as “a strong prison” (I.i.114–115). While this horrible scheme constructed by Cenci’s routines has been examined by scholars, however, more remains to be said about the universal place Beatrice describes. Beatrice, too, speaks both repetitively and about habits, and she also speaks into existence her own sense of place, but it is a place wholly different from her father’s, an imagined place for sympathy and pity that Beatrice’s audience has inhabited over the course of centuries. She calls for “constant” love (V.iv.146) and imagines a broader realm where sympathetic connections span all differences: “I am as universal as the light,” she ultimately says, “Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm / As the world’s centre” (IV.iv.48–50). She establishes this new sense of place in language of constancy and recurrence, and therefore she deploys some of the formal logic of her father’s place-making, but Beatrice thinks more expansively, idealistically, and without concern for personal appetite. Hers is merely addiction-like thinking. The patterns she speaks can shape possible worlds with all the potency of more perilous, material patterns, but she is not limited to the narrow focus of substance dependence. *The Cenci* thus displays, with

its Shelleyan sense of reiteration that shapes the world, idealist possibility emerging within a materialist context.⁴⁹

Terminology

Some of this chapter's key terms, because they are so closely interrelated, can here benefit from clarification:

"Addiction" and "alcoholism" are terms Shelley and his contemporaries would not have used to describe habitual alcohol use, so here I will frequently use terms like "intemperance," widely employed in Shelley's era. Our contemporary sense of addiction, however, closely relates to Shelley's understanding of intemperance, excess, and alcohol use.⁵⁰ Shelley, as I discuss below, had studied and quoted work on alcohol habits that overrun will, work that would prove foundational for medical senses of addictive habit. By "habit," I refer to any behavioral recurrence, willed or unwilled, especially those that became viewed as pattern-making by Shelley. "Pattern" I use to refer to the forms generated by recurrences—poetic and behavioral recurrences alike.

Places Patterned by Habit and Poetry

The medical discourse that informed Shelley's ideas on both habit and world-shaping reiteration had come to his attention early. In his 1813 "Vindication of Natural

⁴⁹ Angela Leighton addresses the coexistence of Shelley's empirical, materialist thinking with his comparatively abstract and idealist sense of sublimity in *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems*. Shelley, she writes, "moves progressively from reliance on empirical arguments, which support his radicalism and atheism, to an interest in the sublime," but Leighton adds that "the two perspectives remain in conflict throughout his life" (vii).

⁵⁰ The years preceding Shelley's writing on diet and perilous habits saw a number of texts that influenced addiction discourse. See, for instance, George Young's *Treatise on Opium* or Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, which discusses both the power of habit over the body in general (I.35) and the dangers specifically of excessive use of "spirituous liquor" (see I.234).

Diet,” Shelley quotes Thomas Trotter, a late eighteenth-century pioneering scholar on alcohol abuse (87). Trotter describes habitual inebriation as illness rather than solely a moral failing—he writes that drunkenness is “a disease of the mind” (174). Shelley would adopt that sense of customary inebriation as a condition that alters the mind for the worse, though he would expand upon Trotter’s discussion to portray how those altered minds shape society. He wrote *The Cenci* in 1819, six years after his “Vindication of Natural Diet,” and he wrote the *Defence of Poetry* in 1821, and while his ideas changed over the course of that time, his views on habit’s potency remain remarkably consistent in these three works. In the “Vindication of Natural Diet,” for instance, Shelley observes the formidable power of sustained alcohol use, describing how thousands have become “domestic tyrants” and “murderers” due to liquor (82). He contends that such habitual consumption, moreover, alters a place:

Who will assert, that had the populace of Paris drank at the pure source of the Seine, and satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable nature, that they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre? (82)

Paris became a torturous place, in Shelley’s view, in part because of regular alcohol consumption and predatory diet. This brutal place is the reversal of the harmonious, more expansive realm of the imagination that salutary poetic recurrence, according to Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*, can structure.⁵¹

⁵¹ In the *Defence of Poetry*, too, Shelley routinely uses language of grand scales and wide scope as opposed to specific, reduced, localized senses of place to convey the realm of the poetic imagination. Poetry “enlarges the mind itself,” he writes, and “enlarges the circumference of the imagination”; poetry at its best offers a “widest dominion” (517).

In Shelley's 1819 tragedy, Count Cenci makes his family's dwelling-places into confining places of torture and terror based on his own habits of predation and consumption, which include a strong attachment to wine. He celebrates, for example, one of the many catastrophes to befall his family (the deaths of his sons) with "bright wine whose purple splendor leaps / And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl / Under the lamp light, as my spirits do" (I.iii.77–80). Cenci's menacing internal "spirits" and wine are alike here, and it is suggested elsewhere that he combines drinking and patriarchal abuse—Orsino, hearing from Beatrice of her father's "dark spirit" (I.ii.61), suggests it could be attributed to "a free life as to wine" (I.ii.76), and Cenci himself counts alcohol consumption among his regular habits.⁵² When speaking of a possible attempt on his life and considering likely scenarios, Cenci asks if someone is to "Put poison in my evening drink? / Or smother me when overcome by wine?" (II.i.142–143). References to his alcoholic drinking typically occur with regard to violence, cruelty, death—results that Shelley's writings on dietary habit would have predicted—and in general, toxic habits oppress Cenci's victims.

Shelley's solution for such ills, both in his essay on vegetarianism and in his *Defence of Poetry*, was simply to apply repetitions more thoughtfully, more healthily, more ethically. He called for recurrences supported by sympathy; in the *Defence*, he claims that poetry especially can promote better habits by regularly activating sympathy in its audience, who might then forge a place or a social world founded upon regular admiration for others. He uses the example of Greece, of "Homer and his contemporaries,"

⁵² Shelley, incidentally, was not alone in recognizing that relationship between patriarchy and toxic habit; the male who seeks knowledge and power was one of the more common figures of nineteenth-century literature's engagement with opium. See particularly Barry Milligan's brief discussion of *Middlemarch*'s addict and doctor in *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (10).

arguing that “the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration” (516). The admirable attributes of Greece, Shelley asserts, were developed through consistent, behavioral replication of poetic patterns. Similarly, Beatrice speaks of creating sympathetic habits through poetic patterns in order to forge a superior place, accessible to a broader, more thoughtful audience than Count Cenci’s realm. To use Beatrice’s words: theirs is a struggle over the sort of “world we make, / The oppressor and the oppressed” (V.iii.74–75).

Despite the importance of unhealthy habit for Shelley’s tragedy as well as for his writings on diet, little has been written about drug use of any kind in his work (though a recent essay by Katherine Singer does much to change this).⁵³ Yet as Anya Taylor has noted, “Shelley, abstemious in drink, may have had a greater interest in Dionysianism than has been previously suspected” (131). Such an interest seems clear in Shelley’s writings on healthy consumption habits (particularly vegetarianism) and also holds relevance for his later work on salutary poetic habits. When Shelley argues in the *Defence of Poetry* that poetry could provide a cure for material excess, for instance, he describes idealist creativity as a response to materialist concerns about toxic habit. Poetry, he claims there, “is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature” (531). Selfish material excess harms humanity, but mind-expanding poetry offers escape

⁵³ For a summary of Shelley’s personal encounters with laudanum, see Singer’s “Stoned Shelley: Revolutionary Tactics and Women Under the Influence.”

from this peril. In both “A Vindication of Natural Diet” and *The Cenci*, too, we see alcohol habit abetting the institution of dangerous locales, and in both texts Shelley opposes such habits to sympathetic patterns.⁵⁴

Shelley had, again, witnessed the beneficially world-shaping effects of sympathetic habits in his journey through Italy, moved by iteration after iteration of Beatrice’s story. In the preface to *The Cenci*, he writes that he observed a simultaneously “national and universal interest” in Beatrice’s story (141), a joining of region-characterizing narrative and relevance to a wider realm of ideal justice, because hers was “a tragedy” with a long-lasting “capacity of awakening and sustaining the sympathy of men” (142). Accordingly, then, Shelley’s tragedy portrays Beatrice’s imaginative shaping of a vaster, universal scheme from her Italian locale, speaking of a greater domain enriched with sympathetic reiteration, while her father merely shapes a prison-world through his brutal habits.

The *Defence of Poetry* proclaims most lucidly Shelley’s belief that poetry and habits could do related, place-making work. As mentioned, Shelley there argues that the two are synonymous: “religious and civil habits of action,” he writes, “are all the instruments and materials of poetry; they may be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonyme of the cause” (513). Evidently, Shelley found that habit and poetry both provide tools for humans to structure their social world, whether these are habits of alcohol use that can form tyrannical and criminal places such as Paris under Robespierre (“Vindication” 82) or the poetically initiated behaviors of Homer’s audience that formed Greece (*Defence of Poetry* 516). These patterns and

⁵⁴ Shelley is insistent about sympathy’s role in the reception of this drama; he writes in the Preface, “The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself” (142).

recurrences did more than shape social places, too—they shaped Shelleyan experience of the world by creating the formal continuity by which the world might be understood. In his “Essay on the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians,” Shelley describes how repeated resemblance configures our experienced reality. He notes that the mind “moulds and completes the shapes in clouds, or in the fire, into the resemblances of whatever form, animal, building, &c., happens to be present to it” (17). Through that recurrence or resemblance, the mind imaginatively “completes” the world by forging and applying formal connections, much as (according to Shelley in his essays on diet) habit’s recurrence moulds the social world into reinforced form.

One great danger for the world we make, then, would be forms of recurrence that deny sympathetic awareness—selfish habits, oppressive habits, poisonous habits. According to those who think in light of addiction discourse (which early nineteenth-century discussions of intemperance were urging along), alcohol does not merely intoxicate.⁵⁵ It can alter one’s habitual, mental being and consequently the societies made of such beings. Shelley had asserted this early, thereby anticipating later fears, voiced by temperance societies, that habitual alcohol use would cause societal as well as personal harm.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ While the Victorian era is more typically associated with the pathologization and medicalization of addiction, by Shelley’s time Thomas Trotter and others had already, in clear terms, described habitual alcohol use as a disease. See Trotter’s *Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness*, 174. There were other influential voices on intemperance at the time, as well. The American Benjamin Rush’s writings on excessive use of tobacco, tea, and alcohol became influential in Britain near the turn of the nineteenth century, through, for example, the adoption of his ideas by the influential Dr. John Lettsom (Brian Harrison 92). See also Benjamin Rush, *The Drunkard’s Emblem; or, An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind. With an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies for Curing Them*.

⁵⁶ See Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815–1872* for a history of those temperance movements. Peter Bailey in *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* describes how those Victorian temperance movements sought a similar end—to produce aesthetic enjoyment that might prove habitual, but less toxic than intemperance, “providing an alternative world of recreation” (59).

The Risks of Habitual Consumption

By the time Shelley travelled to Rome, he had read a great deal of literature on the benefits of good habits. He had studied David Hume, who writes, “The end of all moral speculations is to teach us our duty; and . . . beget correspondent *habits* [my italics]” (*Enquiry* 14). He had read Edmund Burke, who observes in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that “the course of succession is the healthy habit of the British constitution” (109). Sympathetic habits, in particular, were understood by Enlightenment writers to create social stability. By such thinking, the most broadly just social harmony would result from customary respect for individual concerns that mirror one another. To establish Hume’s version of moral good, for instance, sympathy needed to become routine; in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes that “we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy” (579), and, again, he asserted that the maintenance of that moral concern for others required inculcation of particular habits.⁵⁷

Shelley adopted a related view of sympathy’s interrelationship with good habit, a view evident in his contention that admirable Greek habits both sustained and resulted from sympathy initiated by Homeric poetry’s patterns. Yet Shelley also saw a particular force at work in the habitual emotions that might secure sympathy. In “On Love,” he writes, “We are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness” (504). Such a repetitious

⁵⁷ Scholars have noted how sympathy discourse maintained an intense individualism along with an intense commitment to others; Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*, Adela Pinch in *Strange Fits of Passion* writes, “contends that feelings are transsubjective entities that pass between persons; that our feelings are always really someone else’s” (19). This was a complex dynamic. In *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*, David Marshall reflects on Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, writing about “sympathy as an epistemological and aesthetic problem” (5).

compulsion is a lifelong, ingrained habit, “from the instant that we live,” and it almost seems a natural fit for the Enlightenment scheme. As a constant “thirst” after likeness, however, Shelley’s internal drive leads somewhere desirously, rather than simply reiterating what once was. That constant thirst suggests formally patterned, habitual advances toward something more, something different, something elusive. In Shelley’s work the resulting patterns can prove either liberating or dangerous, depending on the pattern-maker’s attitudes toward difference and toward others. Count Cenci, for instance, expresses desirous thirsts repeatedly, but his are explicitly selfish thirsts for poisonous experiences, and they thus create frightening patterns. He “must” drink, he claims (I.iii.170), to aid his villainy.

Shelley had, prior to writing “On Love,” long been concerned with the broad threat posed by dangerous thirsts or consumption habits as well as the salutary possibilities of other kinds of recurrence. In *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*, Timothy Morton describes this especially Shelleyan idea, writing about “how individual acts of consumption are always caught up in something larger” (3). Richard Holmes observes that in the pamphlet “On the Vegetable System of Diet,” “Shelley seemed to be content to argue that political injustice and oppression was the consequence of indigestion” (220). Shelley’s interest in good diet that might eliminate injustice and widespread crime accompanies, in that early work, its reverse: a fear of the bad consumption habits that support oppressive brutality. Shelley opens “A Vindication of Natural Diet” along those lines: “I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life” (77).

What are these bad, unnatural habits that deprave human nature, those sickening practices opposed to moral habits? They are, in Shelley's vegetarian essays, intoxicating and predatory habits, which must be extirpated through the practice of healthier behaviors, more ethically pursued thirsts. In that same essay on natural diet (where he promotes vegetarianism and the drinking of pure water), Shelley compares the consumption of animals' flesh to an alcohol habit, citing Trotter (87). Such habit causes systemic problems intimately linked to the rest of humanity:

How can we take the benefits, and reject the evils of the system, which is now interwoven with all the fibres of our being?—I believe that abstinence from animal food and spirituous liquors, would in a great measure capacitate us for the solution of this important question. (79)

This connection between systemic, evil behaviors and routine alcohol consumption had been made elsewhere by members of Shelley's circle. Sharon Ruston, writing of Shelley's association with the surgeons John Abernethy and William Lawrence, compares Shelley's views on diet to those of another radical vegetarian and student of Lawrence's, Thomas Forster, who wrote an early text on alcohol abuse. Ruston notes that "their mutual interests in the early 1810s are highly suggestive of a shared intellectual circle" (118). Thomas Forster's treatise, *Physiological Reflections on the Destructive Operation of Spiritous and Fermented Liquors on the Animal System*, relates alcohol abuse to bad habits in general, stating that "among the 'evil habits' that presently 'act to our detriment' are 'sedentary occupations and slothful habits of life, confinement in the impure air of cities, irregularities of diet, peculiarities of atmosphere, and the reciprocal

influence of the mind and body on each other” (qtd. Ruston 120).⁵⁸ Forster came to know Shelley as a similarly committed believer in the dangers of certain consumption routines,⁵⁹ and the two shared a sense of alcohol abuse’s position among habits that produce “confinement” in a horrible place.

In general, Shelley was troubled by this potential unhealthiness and social destructiveness of habit even as he understood its aesthetic and ethical benefits (the way it could reinforce and establish regular, sympathetic bonds among people thirsting for likeness). In “On Life,” he writes:

Let us recollect our sensations as children . . . We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves . . . As men grow up, this power commonly decays, and they become mechanical and habitual agents. Their feelings and their reasonings are the combined result of a multitude of entangled thoughts, of a series of what are called impressions, blunted by reiteration. (507–508)

Habit, though it may bind people and give form to sympathetic bonds, though it may regulate the ethical consumption of a vegetarian diet and lead to sustained tranquility, can also blunt feeling, sap vitality, and weaken the capacity for human connection. It can, in its unhealthier varieties, lose its resemblance to stable, Enlightenment habit; it can come to resemble the repetition-compulsion of the death drive observed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—through which the drive to repeat is ultimately a drive to achieve a

⁵⁸ The science of the age bolstered such a sense of a convergence between physiology and psychology. Alan Richardson in *The Neural Sublime* describes several correspondences between Romantic idealism’s aesthetics and the age’s science, including “a materialist or ‘corporeal’ approach to mind” (11).

⁵⁹ Forster is recorded describing an acquaintanceship with Shelley as well as the poet’s vegetarian views; see William E. A. Axon, “Dr. Thomas Forster and Shelley,” *Notes and Queries* s7–VI: 140 (September 1, 1888): 161–162.

state beyond life (43-46)—suggesting also the addict’s self-destruction. This holds grave implications for Shelley’s idea of poetic patterns, which, again, for him could be synonymous with habits. World-shaping recurrence could be vital, imaginative, and life-sustaining or it could be deadly. As William Keach writes in *Shelley’s Style*, “Shelley’s attitude toward language is deeply divided” between the idea of language as “entirely a product of mind” and an awareness that it “inevitably tends to harden into a system in which verbal signs limit thought to a sphere of established, habitual, ‘dead’ relations” (2).

The filicidal, alcoholic Count Cenci quite literally produces that sphere of dead relations. He is the habitual, thirsty consumer gone disastrously wrong—predatory and destructive, voicing a violent kind of poetry in his monologues. In all his cruelty and psychopathic hatefulness, he is the opposite of Shelley’s ideal poet or person of ethical consumption habits. As Stuart Curran puts it, “Cenci embodies the disease of the Romantic spirit more literally than Dr. Johnson could have intended when he defined it as ‘that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life’” (75). In what follows, I consider how in *The Cenci*, Shelley characterizes that hungering disease as a bad habit that imprisons by shaping Cenci’s social world. In the same play, however, Shelley dramatizes a potential cure: the sympathetic patterns inspired by Beatrice.

Count Cenci’s Gothic Realm

The Paris of Robespierre became what it did in part because of dietary habit—particularly because of alcoholic habits, according to the younger Shelley. In *The Cenci*, such habits also contribute to a terrifying place, now through a perversion of world-shaping poetry (whose patterns, as we see in Cenci’s language, are dictated by his

consumption habits, which for him are often related to wine). Again, Shelley was discovering that habit itself *is* poetic (“religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry”) (*Defence of Poetry* 513), and in Cenci’s case, habit and poetry become synonymous most oppressively, turning his domestic place into a prison for his family.

Cenci applies poetic language characterized by bodily reiteration to communicate and continue his destructive physical habits, which then imprison those he wishes to harm. He announces near the play’s start:

I rarely kill the body which preserves,
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear
For hourly pain. (I.i.114–117)

Corporeal recurrence, “hourly” recurrence of bodily suffering, produces anguish that structures the imprisonment of Cenci’s typical, usual victims (he “rarely” kills). Suffering body and suffering mind join metonymically here in “the breath of fear,” and Cenci’s tendencies make possible the imprisoning recurrence of that union. This is how his logic of toxic habits extends to the “prisons” he constructs: he speaks and commands according to habits that bodily contain and entrap. He orders and uses his domain for the sake of that habitual entrapment, taking his family, for instance, to “the Castle of Petrella” because it is “safely walled, and moated round about,” and it has “dungeons underground” as well as “thick towers” (II.i.168–170). Cenci rules over an enclosed realm in order to pursue routine predation. It was the Gothically oppressive architecture of that realm, moreover, that had seized Shelley’s attention; he notes in *The Cenci*’s preface that the

Cenci Palace, “dark and lofty” with “gloomy subterranean chambers, struck me particularly” (145).

Contemporary readers are increasingly taking note of a fundamental connection between the Gothic and addiction. A recent issue of *Gothic Studies* focuses explicitly on this. There Thomas H. Schmid notes the spatial dimensions of Gothic addiction, writing: “Isolated physical settings — prisons, dungeons, monastic cloisters, remote castles, secret laboratories — have of course played a frequent role in creating the ‘atmosphere’ of numerous Gothic novels . . . But spatial/geographical isolation can also signal varieties of psychological and social alienation within Gothic texts,” an isolation that, using Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an example, Schmid describes in terms of addiction (19). The construction of Gothic worlds, Schmid suggests, reflects characteristics of addiction.

The habits through which Shelley’s Cenci makes his Gothic palace torturous frequently pertain to alcohol, too. Cenci exhibits this connection in language of compulsion and recurrence, suggesting the age’s evolving discourse on intemperance and anticipating Victorian thinking about alcohol compulsion. Having reflected on the deaths of his sons and planning further assault on his family, he addresses his drink with an incantatory command—and he in turn feels commanded:

Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my veins, and manhood’s purpose stern,
And age’s firm, cold, subtle villainy;
As if thou wert indeed my children’s blood
Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well;
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear! (I.iii.173–178)

The drink supports his evil—the “charm works well” by affecting Cenci physiologically, in his veins—and Cenci is driven here through thirsty thoughts of extremely limited physical recurrence. Consumed wine metonymically links to Cenci’s blood (“within” his “veins”), which is itself genetically linked to his sons’ blood that he wishes to drink; wine that courses into the blood thus suggests to Cenci desired drinking of related blood. Intensely repetitive language of compulsion follows this consumption: “It must be done; it shall be done,” he says, accepting the charge of “the charm” and speaking of ensuing catastrophe.

Cenci’s habitual drinking of wine sustains other villainous poetic patterns, in short. I have already partly quoted the passage in which, exulting over word that his sons have died, he cries:

Oh, thou bright wine whose purple splendor leaps
And bubbles gaily in this golden bowl
Under the lamp light, as my spirits do,
To hear the death of my accursed sons! (I.iii.77–80)

Spirit and wine correlate here, finding harmonious recurrence through one another, and it is a habit-forming recurrence. Later, planning his assault on his daughter, Cenci makes the following demand: “Fill up this goblet with Greek wine. I said / I would not drink this evening; but I must” (I.iii.169–170). He must drink, he claims, even if he had not originally wished to do so. His is no typical alcoholic thirst—it is sadistically charged and monstrous—but his predation thrives through wine and matches Shelley’s earlier understanding of criminals’ toxic habits. His sadistic drives are given oppressively repetitive form by a habit that, if not explicitly termed addictive in the play, does

anticipate addiction's compulsions that would be described medically as the nineteenth century progressed. Cenci's predatory consumption habits create a world that entraps in a manner suggestive of addiction. We see him uttering into being a kind of imprisonment for his terrorized daughter, keeping her in "chains" (IV.i.7–8), and to complete that imprisonment, he seeks to establish a life-destroying diet for her: "let her food be / Poison, until she be encrusted round / With leprous stains!" (IV.i.128–130). He describes feeding his victim poison continually as a method for imprisoning through toxic consumption habits.

Elsewhere, when the guests at the first act's banquet—having heard Cenci celebrate the deaths of his sons—express empathy toward the victims, Cenci passes the wine and tells them, "Enjoy yourselves" (I.iii.96). He then articulates a place of tyranny structured by consumption that corresponds to his crimes, by the drinking of wine that he wishes to represent his son's blood. Here, he addresses that wine:

Could I believe thou wert their mingled blood,
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament,
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell,
Who, if a father's curses, as men say,
Climb with swift wings after their children's souls,
And drag them from the very throne of Heaven,
Now triumphs in my triumph!—But thou art
Superfluous; I have drunken deep of joy
And I will taste no other wine to-night.

Here, Andrea! Bear the bowl around. (I.iii.81–90)⁶⁰

Cenci judges the wine to be made superfluous by the already intoxicating thought of his son's blood, and so he orders that the wine be shared. Again he expresses his villainy through the terms of alcohol consumption, encouraging its circulating repetition. And verbal repetition in the above passage—triumphing in triumph—builds to the word “superfluous,” emphasized so suddenly at the beginning of its line and followed by a doubly emphatic caesura. No rising and falling determines this speech. Instead, steady amassing contributes to excess, leading Cenci to pass the wine around to his guests. The bad habit poetically sets the scene.

Cenci himself recognizes such piling, and even makes mere piling his goal, as he explains to his wife, Lucretia:

When all is done, out in the wide Campagna,

I will pile up my silver and my gold;

My costly robes, paintings and tapestries;

My parchments and all records of my wealth . . . (IV.i.55–58)

His narrative comprises gain at the expense of the rest of the world; his poetic speech comprises a stack of empty repetitions, triumphs after disgusting triumphs, robes on paintings on tapestries, to no end other than the creation of a place sick with excess (a pile of gold and silver and parchments on a malarial swamp).⁶¹ Poetry and bad habit combine nightmarishly here, forging Cenci's idea of a preferred locale.

⁶⁰ There is here a clear perversion of the Catholic ritual of communion. See, for more on this, Mary Finn, “The Ethics and Aesthetics of Shelley's ‘The Cenci’.” See also Hugh Roberts, “Mere poetry and strange flesh: Shelley's *The Cenci* and Calderón's *El Purgatorio de San Patricio*.”

⁶¹ See the footnote on page 176 of *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, which briefly covers the malarial associations with the Campagna.

Limits tighten around such a place, however, even as Cenci demands a pile of great height. His is not a domain of pure expanse—the pile he calls for is vertically extensive, perhaps, but not horizontally vast.⁶² Cenci's world has constraints placed on it by his predatory habit, and his family members begin to repeat his own violent terms and habits. Thus Cenci can pile his wealth, but his place of power and piled-up wealth becomes a place of entrapment for himself as well.

Beatrice, on the other hand, introduces a more expansive place, and Gothic dramatic conventions often interweave such enormous and enclosing places. "Play after play," Jeffrey Cox writes, "traces a movement from an enclosed, prison-like structure dominated by an evil aristocrat to an open space where the lovers can be united and the crimes of their oppressors revealed" (128). This combination of oppressive enclosure and freeing openness suits Shelley's preoccupation with habits that confine versus the wider places of benevolent habits that might sympathetically connect with others—which Beatrice, speaking of universal space, envisions. Count Cenci imprisons others, and his avarice drives him to expand in limiting ways that could never satisfy him, could never offer him freedom, and ultimately traps him. All this supports a drama of conflicting places, with the heroine Beatrice accessing, if only in soberly imaginative speech, the more universal, open place.⁶³

Yet for all Shelley's advocacy of soberly willed habits of imagination, aestheticized addiction has come to seem like a Romantic legacy. Scholars acknowledge

⁶² Such a huge but entrapping place recalls the places imagined in other nineteenth-century literature of addiction, such as De Quincey's scene based on the labyrinthine image of Piranesi's staircase, in which stairs seem to repeat infinitely in a maze. See Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings* (78).

⁶³ By motivating tyrannical poetic patterns that structure the world, intemperate habit also suits what Cian Duffy identifies as "the Shelleyan sublime," which emphasizes "the historical and political implications of the landscape" (9).

that a combination of medical and literary work from this period first articulated much of what would be considered addiction. Susan Zieger has described the almost total dominance of De Quincey over later nineteenth-century addiction writing.⁶⁴ Clifford Siskin writes that De Quincey's "*Confessions*, for example, was taken by the *Eclectic Review* in 1822 to be primarily a medical treatise; although today's physicians certainly would not accept that classification, it remains in many cases the chief authority behind even their knowledge of opium's effects" (183). Alethea Hayter observes in *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, "Generalizations as to how opium affects the mental operations of all addicts began and continued to be made from the individual cases of De Quincey and Coleridge" (36).

The Cenci, however, emphasizes through Beatrice willed habits that confront oppressive and toxic habits; Beatrice resists a habitually alcohol-drinking tyrant who uses the language of requirement, of compulsion—specifically, the word “must”—when describing his sadistic intentions: “It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!” Cenci says while preparing an assault (I.iii.178) as well as: “I said / I would not drink this evening; but I must” (I.iii.169–170). The habits that give form to Cenci's cruelty anticipate addiction, then, but Beatrice directs her imaginative work in opposition to all that. By dramatizing habitual entrapment overcome by Beatrice's final sense of expansive, divine justice and universal sympathy, Shelley's tragedy gives voice to the possibility that we may poetically shape into existence a preferable social order.⁶⁵ Against the dangerous

⁶⁴ “Distinguishing oneself from De Quincey was a problem for every nineteenth-century drug autobiographer,” Susan Zieger notes (39).

⁶⁵ A related radical strain has been noted elsewhere in the Gothic. See E.J. Clery, “Horace Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* and the Impossibility of Female Desire,” in which Clery observes Walpole's initiation of the Gothic as a major phase in English drama, and finds in Walpole's play a foregrounding of rebellious female desire. Clery notes “hints that female desire has its own, autonomous and selfish volition, that it might be impervious to the social desiderata of reproduction and the patriarchal family” (36).

world forged by habitual intoxication and predatory habits, Shelley thus poses sympathetic—if addiction-like in its intense orientation to the unattained—patterning.

The Possibility of a Better Place

Beatrice's envisioned liberation challenges the rule of Count Cenci, who has held her captive in terms of noxious dietary habits, keeping her "in damp cells / Where scaly reptiles crawl"; he "starves her there, / Till she will eat strange flesh" (III.i.46–48). She fights back against such tyranny, though it comes close to eliminating her before she can pursue justice. Cenci's abuses nearly digest his daughter's physical being. She says:

There creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me . . . 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another,
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life! (III.i.16–23)

There is in the language a sinister wrapping-around; the words "creeps" and "dissolves" creep and dissolve through enjambment into their following lines, and "substantial, heavy, thick" adjectives describing that "clinging, black, contaminating" wrapping are weightily slowed down by caesuras, creating emphatic lists of three that mirror the good list of "subtle, pure, and inmost." In these lines, material, dietetic concerns match spiritual fears, all of which repeatedly and poetically coil around the victim, creating the lyrical form of

a bad habit.⁶⁶ The language here clings, it contaminates, it is heavy, it is thick. The repetitions get increasingly worse for Beatrice. Habitual poisonous consumption (echoing the alcohol habit and also the meat-eating that Shelley criticized in his “Vindication of Natural Diet”), taking the form of vicious poetry, corrupts the spirit trapped in Cenci’s prison.

Beatrice, however, converts this terrible place imaginatively, producing poetically a sense of a grander realm. “I was just dreaming,” she says after her father’s death, “That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest / This cell seems like a kind of Paradise / After our father’s presence” (V.iii.9–12). She speaks here in terms of benevolent dreams, using repetitive language (“Paradise . . . Paradise”) to reinforce a sense of a differently perceived place, one no longer designed through carnivorous or poisonous patterns. Beatrice has been thinking before this moment in terms of Cenci’s horrible realm and her own desired escape into a larger place. She has described her traumatized state in architectural terms of bewildering imprisonment: “The pavement spins under my feet!” she cries. “The walls / Spin round!” (III.i.9–10). She observes here that her “putrefying limbs / Shut round and sepulcher the panting soul,” but even in this moment she suggests a sense of imagined, ideal escape into a vaster realm, for hers, she says, is a soul “Which would burst forth into the wandering air” (III.i.26–28).

That greater place, in Beatrice’s mind, becomes imagined in terms of sympathetic patterns. Before she and her mother are to die—having killed Count Cenci—Beatrice asks her surviving brother to create a better future through better habits:

be constant to the love

⁶⁶ See Laura Wells Betz, “‘At once mild and animating’: *Prometheus Unbound* and Shelley’s Spell of Style.” She describes a tendency to view the repetitions in Shelley’s poetry as spells, a similarly repetitive language that establishes some control.

Thou bearest us; and to the faith that I,
Though wrapt in a strange cloud of crime and shame,
Lived ever holy and unstained. (V.iv.146–149)

She calls for a constancy that Shelley had personally experienced through multiple representations of Beatrice: the constancy of love and sympathy for the resister of tyranny, a constancy that in turn helped form the inspiring version of Rome encountered by Shelley. Beatrice speaks of a superior and more sustainable habit, a constancy that can alter the world for peaceful ends, and she does so with mention of her own “ever holy,” habitual self. And to ease her mother’s fears near the close of the tragedy, she offers a “dull old thing, / Some outworn and unused monotony, / Such as our country gossips sing” (V.iii.124–126). Sympathetic poetic recurrence here encourages thinking in terms of expansive place (the country, the fields of rural Italy) by monotonously directing her mother to consider connections to those things that lie beyond her immediate circumstances. There is comfort to be had, and a wider world to be conceived of, through thoughtful repetitions.

Earlier, after Cenci has celebrated (with wine) the deaths of his sons, Beatrice interrupts his banquet and asks the guests anaphoric questions that urge critical thought. “What, if ‘tis he who clothed us in these limbs / Who tortures them, and triumphs? What, if we, / The desolate and the dead, were his own flesh” (I.iii.102–104). These are patterns full of critical suggestions about this tyrant’s abuses, building to a fundamentally important question about the play’s conflict between imprisonment and the outside world’s enormity: “Shall we therefore find / No refuge in this merciless wide world?” (I.iii.106–107). Beatrice, from the start, has her thoughts trained on a vaster place, toward

the “wide world.” Throughout the play, before and after overthrowing Cenci, she repeatedly speaks of such a wider world, a more open place, or, at last, a “kind of Paradise.”

It is a probing, sympathetic intelligence that leads Beatrice to think outward, and she also urges Cenci’s banquet guests to “think” about things (rather than, as her father urges, to “enjoy”): “Oh, think what deep wrongs must have blotted out / First love, then reverence in a child’s prone mind / Till it thus vanquish shame and fear! O, think” (I.iii.108–110). A new poetic habit takes shape in her repetitions of “think . . . think,” a critically sympathetic habit, quite different from the habit of consumption urged by her father. Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, equates studiously applied, rhythmically articulated thoughtfulness with sympathetic poetry, describing Francis Bacon as a poet because his “language has a sweet and majestic rhythm . . . it is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the hearer’s mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy” (514–515). For Shelley, sympathetic thinking could, poetically, connect universally; the Italian reception and transmission of Beatrice’s story had demonstrated one example of this phenomenon.

Shelley’s Beatrice patiently endeavors to think sympathetically, even of the evil Cenci. She says that she has “excused much, doubted; and when no doubt / Remained,” she “sought by patience, love and tears / To soften him” (I.iii.114–116). And though these tendencies do not save her life—she ultimately turns to violent revolt to overthrow her father and is then executed—they underlie her thoughtfulness and her ability to communicate an imagined realm shaped by sympathy. Before her execution, she begins to speak more confidently of the ideal realm free from hungering, patriarchal abuse and

constructed of a wide-ranging sympathy. “O, not to Rome,” Beatrice’s mother Lucretia cries to her, while despairing over the place associated with Cenci’s injustice and torments. “O, take us not to Rome,” she repeats (IV.iv.158). Again, repetitive expression in Count Cenci’s world can reinforce a sense of entrapment (“to Rome . . . to Rome”). Beatrice, however, demonstrates that she knows how material places can be altered by such spoken patterns and performed habits. She responds by repetitively sounding out a different place, one of universal interconnection: “Why not to Rome, dear mother? There as here / Our innocence is as an armed heel / To trample accusation. God is there / As here” (IV.iv.159–162).

While Lucretia despairs at the claustrophobic sense of Roman justice, Beatrice repetitively contemplates the world in all its interlinking variety, its related “heres” and “theres,” as opposed also to Count Cenci, who relentlessly pursues the sameness of his murderous wishes. Beatrice may perceive and proclaim similarities, but these similarities offer a comforting expanse, an interconnected universe of different places, both “here” and “there.” Stuart Curran observes that “the tragedy Shelley created . . . is invested with a universality of alarming dimensions” (43), but Beatrice sees promise in universality. She declares herself “universal as the light” (IV.iv.48), and seeks to comfort different people, such as her mother, in terms of universalism. From that perspective, Beatrice thinks critically about the local, human-made place that terrifies Lucretia.⁶⁷ The place-making poetic repetition evoked by Beatrice—indeed, used by Beatrice when she speaks

⁶⁷ Such connections between poetic recurrence and reflexive place-making, including the place-making of psychological self-imprisonment and abstracted escape, are noted by Keach. In *Shelley’s Style*, he describes the reflexivity of Shelley’s poetry with regard to Satan’s belief in *Paradise Lost* that “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (I.254-5) (qtd. Keach 90). Keach writes that for Shelley, the mind escapes such a mental, solipsistic imprisonment “by reenacting the mind’s necessarily reflexive condition in a verbal artifact. The mind ‘defeats’ its ‘curse’ by repeating and articulating it at a higher level of self-consciousness” (91).

of constancy and monotony, reiterates “there and here,” and describes a universal place or Paradise—ultimately undermines Cenci’s rule effectively. True, Beatrice remains trapped by her father’s despotism until she turns to violence and meets a violent end herself, but her descriptions of sympathetic constancy provide longer-term solutions to the problem of the out-of-control reiterations of the Cenci patriarch. She asks for what would, as Shelley knew, come to pass: an audience “constant to the love” for her, an audience thus more sympathetic toward the oppressed (V.iv.146).

Gilles Deleuze, summarizing and elaborating upon Hume, describes in *Difference and Repetition* a repetition that functions much as Beatrice’s sympathetic monotones and constancies do. This is a creative repetition, not destructive, based on the idea that consciousness might grow through repetitions and not strictly devolve into addicted stupor. “The repetition,” Deleuze notes, “changes nothing in the object . . . On the other hand, a change is produced in the mind which contemplates: a difference, something new *in the mind*” (70). After undergoing this change, the mind can recognize distinctions as well as similarities—both of which are required for sympathy. Such a mind, furthermore, understands that no repetition can stably maintain what it repeats: a change occurs through the mere consciousness of repetition, and sameness is thus always loaded with difference. The Shelleyan proto-addict lacks much of that consciousness, driven too mindlessly toward toxic sameness. For Beatrice, on the other hand, reiterations *can* encourage heightened consciousness and respect for the relationship between sameness and difference. Her repeated expression of “there as here” critiques Count Cenci’s rule, for example, by asserting a sameness across different terms, where the ravenous consumer would hope only to consume sameness without regard for any kind of

difference. While her father destroys life, Beatrice's articulated repetitions thus support something new, speaking into existence the terms for a place of sympathetic awareness. Her repetitions of Count Cenci's behavior, by adding a deeper sense of tragedy, can only increase pitying reflection in the world she seeks to re-pattern.

Shelley had seen this powerful place-making. He had been steered through Rome by echoes of Beatrice—in visual art, in architecture, in literature—and had seen how a specifically Italian place drew from echoing sentiments toward Beatrice, transmitted by generations of Italians and by visitors. Shelley observes in the preface to *The Cenci*, “On my arrival at Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest” (141). Alan Weinberg describes how Beatrice “had become, in the minds of Italians, a national figure and Shelley, who admired such excellence of character, strove to do justice to her Italian qualities” (79). In other words, Beatrice had sentimentally, repetitively, become part of Italy's self-conception, part of how it communicated itself to visitors, and *The Cenci* is attentive to such place-creation.

Near the play's close, as Beatrice strives to imagine a better world into poetic being, she self-consciously considers, “what a world we make, / The oppressor and the oppressed” (V.iii.74–75). By evoking sympathetically patterned response in an audience, Beatrice does what she can to ensure that this world might become at least more aware of the oppressed. Perhaps poetic world-shaping, when motivated by intoxicated impulses, might work as an addiction that drains humanity. Yet Beatrice's soberly and merely addiction-like poetic strategies urge repetitive experience that is sympathetic, by which her audience across centuries might routinely contemplate the perils of oppressive habits

as well as the need for liberating patterns that can remake the world. *The Cenci* thus lucidly illustrates the vast gulf separating actual intemperance or addiction from the addiction-like literary strategy for patterning possible worlds around intense repetitions.

CHAPTER 3
THE ADDICT’S LABYRINTH IN DE QUINCEY’S *CONFESSIONS OF AN*
ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER

I went back to my car again and sat and sat. The top dripped on my knees and my stomach burned from the whiskey. No more cars came up the hill. No lights went on in the house before which I was parked. It seemed like a nice neighborhood to have bad habits in.

-Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (33)

Private investigator Philip Marlowe sits outside a criminal’s lair, where he will later discover—along with a corpse, Chinese décor, and a drugged witness—what he thinks might be laudanum (34–36). The scene, with its association of opium, crime, and Asia, recalls British literature of the nineteenth century, from Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English-Opium Eater* to the Sherlock Holmes stories.⁶⁸ Even the basic shape of *The Big Sleep*’s narrative matches those earlier writings. Marlowe’s movements, punctuated and inflected by coffee and alcohol, work like the investigations pursued by De Quincey—while addictively consuming, both of these seekers repeatedly, desirously explore worlds full of related, ongoing repetitions. In this chapter, I examine how De Quincey in particular deployed addiction-like strategies for charting labyrinthine worlds

⁶⁸ Conan Doyle’s “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” for instance, involves an addict specifically compared to De Quincey.

of sustained, habitual possibility-pursuit.⁶⁹ Such strategies constituted a revision of aesthetics that valorized stable habitual experience.

In *The Big Sleep* and *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, addictive habits provide patterns that give narrated worlds both their repetitive forms and their air of intensely mysterious possibility. Marlowe, for instance, drinks and investigates and drinks and investigates—that is much of the plot of *The Big Sleep*. His drinking and his investigative habit are interlinked. The thirsty and inquisitive detective is rarely wholly satisfied, rarely accepting of immediate appearances, and thus (reflecting his own experience of repetitiously “sitting and sitting” and drinking) conjectures in the above scene about a possible world of other bad habits—that “nice neighborhood to have bad habits in,” a world in which he will repeatedly investigate.

Marlowe returns to that crime scene’s “nice neighborhood.” There he has already found a corpse next to the drugged daughter of a wealthy general, and there he next finds that the corpse has gone missing. He discovers still more mystery through reiterated investigating, through continuous, habitual pursuit in his realm understood both conjecturally and in terms of “bad habits.” The result—the entirety of *The Big Sleep*—is one of the more complete examples of addiction-like narrative.

De Quincey does something similar in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, where he depicts labyrinths of endless possibility understood in terms set by addiction’s endlessly repetitive pursuit of possibility. In this chapter, I pay closest attention to one example from the *Confessions*: the labyrinthine staircases of an image by Giovanni Piranesi, as described by De Quincey. This imaginary realm provides De Quincey with

⁶⁹ When referring to the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, unless I note otherwise, I refer to the edition edited by Barry Milligan (London: Penguin, 2003), 3–88.

another place of habitual possibility-pursuit, a place of endless repetitions to ponder repetitively. It's also a place that exists only in language for De Quincey, who never saw the Piranesi image of replicating staircases but learned of it from Coleridge's account (see Burwick 45–46). De Quincey, we know, had come to accept that Coleridge's thinking and responses were shaped by his difficulties with opium, and so he would have easily seen correlations between opium habit and Coleridge's aesthetic reception of an image of endless staircases. Consequently, while writing about his own experiences of addiction and other compulsive habits, De Quincey uses this Coleridgean-Piranesian image to characterize addiction-like experience; he takes the reader through that Piranesian realm supporting intensely repetitive possibility-pursuit, and he does so in the similarly addiction-like, repetitive language of pursuit.

De Quincey's addiction-like tactics in his Piranesi scene are representative of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*'s broader narrative of young De Quincey exploring dream-like (or nightmarish) possibility. For instance, he devotes particular emphasis to his early education and flight into impoverished wandering, which he believes to be reflected by the misadventures and pained cravings of his years of opium use (39–40). He writes of these early years of poverty as a time of escapist, imaginative yearning:

. . . oftentimes on moonlight nights, during my first mournful abode in London, my consolation was (if such could be thought) to gaze from Oxford-street up every avenue in succession which pierces through the heart of Marylebone to the field and the woods; for *that*, said I, travelling with my eyes up the long vistas which lay part in light and part in shade,

‘*that* is the road to the North . . . and if I had the wings of a dove, *that* way I would fly for comfort.’ (40)

The irony, as De Quincey next mentions, is that in the north his addiction would commence, and so there even more potent desires (for opium, especially) and intensified imagined vistas would occupy his mind; this would be the period, he tells us, when the “second birth of my sufferings began” (40). In the thrall of addiction, he will be “persecuted by visions as ugly, and as ghastly phantoms as ever haunted the couch of an Orestes” (40). The addiction De Quincey narrates intensifies his preexisting tendency to imagine possibility from a condition of yearning. In this later period, while each successive dose of opium fails to satisfy, he is increasingly beset by dreams alluding to vaster and vaster realms of unreality. As he transitions from a pleasurable early phase of opium use to the period of pain, these become repetitive nightmares of enormous scale, and De Quincey describes them in richly addiction-like, repetitive language. Such language, I will show, lived up to De Quincey’s sublime aesthetic ideals and supported the DeQuinceyan kind of literature in which explorations of otherness occur unremittingly.

The creative tactics De Quincey derives from a condition of intensified orientation toward possibility support the claim that “stories happen, are enacted in certain kinds of possible worlds” (Doležel 31). De Quincey’s frightening, confessional “stories” of addiction—known to be some combination of fact and hallucinatory fiction—demonstrate how intensified literary creation can emerge from a stronger, addiction-like commitment to the possible. Though I will focus on the one scene of the infinite staircases, De Quincey’s *Confessions* produces multiple related worlds. This was

a breakthrough for a number of reasons—De Quincey’s *Confessions* was one of the earlier texts of any kind to insist on the addictive, entrapping properties of opium, and it simultaneously clarified a literary, aesthetically registered version of addiction, which opened up new senses of exploratory adventures into possibility.

Doležel observes a similar relationship between exploratory pursuit and literary production; he notes that writing is a matter of *both* “making and understanding a world” (42). Trying to navigate and understand that which is not immediately grasped, the argument goes, supports articulation of related possibilities in the form of a possible, narrated world. This is what happens with Chandler’s bibulous Marlowe, who both desirously studies and articulates a possible neighborhood in terms of ongoing, perilous habits.⁷⁰ In the addict’s repetitive pursuit of possibility, De Quincey too found a model for producing literary worlds of intense possibility. The De Quincey of the *Confessions* would, like Chandler’s detective, regard possible worlds due to and in terms of his compelling habits, but like the realm of habits contemplated by Philip Marlowe, De Quincey’s addiction-like, imagined worlds are murkily comprehensible, conjectural places in which one can get quite lost.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Pursuit of knowledge is, for Doležel, central to a basic category of narrative modalities; these are “epistemic modalities,” which “release their story-generating energy because of uneven distribution of knowledge among fictional persons” (126).

⁷¹ Much scholarship on De Quincey in recent decades has centered on one of two focal points: De Quincey’s attitudes toward empire, particularly in his discussions of Asia (Barrell; Leask) and his recursiveness—his endless reflections on himself, things he has read, or things he has internalized (Clej; Russett). De Quincey in the *Confessions* focuses on both the external world and the internal concerns of his isolated, familiar self. In this chapter, I hope to resolve some of the tension between those two points, arguing that De Quincey’s addictive, exploratory preoccupation with the possible entails, always, one foot in the familiar, one foot stepping out into the unknown.

De Quincey's Aesthetic Habits

Thomas De Quincey was no idle addict; his obsessions, in general, could be quite productive. He read as hungrily as he wrote, and when he encountered poets he admired, he showed little restraint, fashioning himself into a writer after their examples. The enthusiasm was apparent at a young age. In an early diary entry, under the heading of "POETS" he lists "S. T. Coleridge" and "Wordsworth!!!" (*Diary of Thomas De Quincey* 145–146). This Lake-Poets obsession started in January 1801, when the fifteen-year-old De Quincey bought a copy of the *Lyrical Ballads* and became so enamored with the poetry that he sought out the anonymous poets' names (and later, with mixed results, their friendship), making Wordsworth, as one De Quincey biographer writes, a "chief god of Thomas's pantheon, with Coleridge a close second" (Lindop 49). In 1803, De Quincey wrote to Wordsworth, "I have no other motive for soliciting your friendship than what (I should think) every man, who has read and felt the 'Lyrical Ballads', must have in common with me" (qtd Sackville-West 65). He would express an obsession with Coleridge that same year: "I walk home thinking of *Coleridge*; – am in transports of love and admiration for him . . . I begin to think him the greatest man that has ever appeared" (*Diary of Thomas De Quincey* 191–192).

Letters were exchanged and something like friendship grew between De Quincey and the poets of the Lake District. De Quincey's career as an essayist gradually flourished under their influence (and while he endured the effects of opium addiction along with his various neuroses). In 1809, Coleridge described a troubled De Quincey with warm, yet critical, amusement:

I both respect and have an affection for Mr De Quincey; but saw too much of his turn of mind, anxious yet dilatory, confused from over-accuracy, & at once systematic and labyrinthine. . .

But so it is! We cannot be perfect. I do far worse both for myself and others by indifference about my compositions & what is thought or said of them, than he by over-irritability— His is a more natural fault & linked to better qualities. (Coleridge *Letters* III.205–6)

Coleridge saw a psychological labyrinth in his acolyte's prose, a characteristic he related to "better qualities." The poet seems to have recognized a particular kind of obsessive maze-making going on in De Quincey's head.

In writing about addiction, De Quincey would deliberately display that maze-like thinking Coleridge described. His opium addiction began in the early years of the nineteenth century, and he would fashion literature out of addiction's patterns in his 1821 *Confessions*, sublimating the condition into a work famed for its labyrinthine worlds. And in his essays on the Lake Poets, when De Quincey diagnoses Coleridge, he relates Coleridge's opium-addiction to labyrinths of Coleridge's own (it is also there that De Quincey creates scenes whose uncharitable tones remind us that he had destroyed his friendships with his former idols). He describes Coleridge as a lost man, dizzy, with "apparent difficulty in recovering his position amongst day-light realities" (*Recollections* 44). He depicts Coleridge as an opium addict "burying himself in the profoundest abstractions, from life and human sensibilities" (*Recollections* 93). De Quincey and

Coleridge saw similar mental dungeons in each other's thoughts. For De Quincey, those dungeons seemed especially expanded by addiction.

Opium addiction would have been all the more labyrinthine to addicts in De Quincey's day, in part because there was no reliable system for escaping to recovery. The torments of addiction would color much of De Quincey's adult life, extending beyond the period covered in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, as he himself mentions in the sequel, *Suspiria De Profundis*. He writes there that at the close of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, "the reader was instructed to believe . . . that I had mastered the tyranny of opium. The fact is, that *twice* I mastered it, and by efforts even more prodigious, in the second of these cases, than in the first" (91). He would always struggle to cast off addiction. He writes in *Suspiria De Profundis* of "one error I committed in both" attempts to quit: "I did not connect with the abstinence from opium – so trying to the fortitude under *any* circumstances – that enormity of exercise which . . . is the one sole resource for making it endurable" (91–92). De Quincey had few ways of knowing beforehand that quitting habitual use of narcotics would require a massive amount of stamina and effort. This was an era when often the "habit was . . . excess of a normal indulgence, as drunkenness was. Even the doctors were not sure how dangerous it was, and the general public took it for granted" (Hayter 34). Habitual opium-consumption was usual; it was normal. And while the enslaving nature of opium and the habitual potency of alcoholic inebriety had been cited before De Quincey wrote, drug addiction remained largely a mystery. "It was not till *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* was published," Alethea Hayter writes, "that opium addiction began to be considered as a separate medical and psychological phenomenon which ought to be studied" (34).

Addictive properties of opium were, though, at least acknowledged by some in the early nineteenth century. In *Opium and the People*, Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards observe that the addictive properties of opium were discussed as early as the eighteenth century, such as in Dr. John Jones's *Mysteries of Opium Reveal'd*, from 1700, and George Young's *Treatise on Opium* from the 1750s (xxiv–xxv).⁷² Yet, Berridge and Griffith write, “At the opening of the nineteenth century . . . doctors and others still thought of opium not as dangerous or threatening, but as central to medicine, a medicament of surpassing usefulness” (xxv). Addiction was slowly becoming known, in other words, but not greatly feared or deeply understood, which could only have made it more difficult to recover in the ways we now know. Thus De Quincey's recovery from opium habituation was even more experimental, even more of a continuation of his general addiction-like process of repetitive pursuit.

Something else also encouraged De Quincey to create literary labyrinths patterned after addiction: he wrote when addiction would have seemed not just labyrinthine, but especially literary, and not only because he had seen Coleridge's habit up-close. Gluttonous consumption had become linked to excessive reading habits in the Romantic consumer. The early nineteenth century saw the growth of mass literary culture, and the Romantics also looked back upon an over-brimming English literary tradition.⁷³ As Andrew Piper writes in *Dreaming in Books*, “Romanticism is what happens when . . . there are *too many* books to read” (12). There was now a readerly version of excessive consumption; Patrick Brantlinger in *The Reading Lesson* describes how novel-reading

⁷² Louise Foxcroft describes the basic understanding of addiction that did indeed precede Romanticism. She writes that “eighteenth-century physicians investigating the consequences of taking opium regularly . . . knew very well what they were dealing with” (117).

⁷³ I refer in part to what Walter Jackson Bate calls “the burden of the past” in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*.

among an increasingly literate populace in the nineteenth century was often viewed as an addiction (3). There was some panic over a massively shared loss of control to an early entertainment industry, nervousness about readers losing their grips on lucid rational thinking and disciplined, respectable behavior due to their habits of over-indulgence in the effusions of sentimental and thrilling literature.

De Quincey, a writer for periodicals—and one of the most committed Romantic readers—encountered intensely repetitive literary habit up-close and made sure to relate that literary habit to his own addiction. Margaret Russet notes that addiction was for De Quincey “first a condition of reading” (18). Throughout the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey describes opium in literary ways, referring, for instance, to “eloquent opium! that with thy potent rhetoric stealest away the purposes of wrath” (55). Opium, altering emotions and habits, works for De Quincey in a manner he can only think of as linguistic, as a manner of potent rhetoric and mighty eloquence. The function of opium addiction thus reminds De Quincey of his other preferred form of emotionally effective, mind-altering experience: language-based experience.

De Quincey’s sense of linguistic communication and literary production that matches addictive consumption conflicted with the stated ideals of his heroes, however. In the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge writes of the “self-sufficing power of absolute *Genius*” (31). For Wordsworth in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet has a “power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement” (420).⁷⁴ De Quincey the Romantic reader and obsessed fan, on the other hand, always sought external excitement, whether in literature or in

⁷⁴ This is a quote from the 1802 preface.

opium. His *Confessions* shows a particularly vexed, addicted union between mind and world, in which the world is provisionally known in ways that never satisfy, through repetitive experiences that flow on endlessly. Literal addiction resembled De Quincey's obsessive-explorer's version of aesthetic experience, and the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* shows De Quincey clarifying that resemblance.

De Quincey's narrative of addiction is, then, rich with aesthetic, impassioned reverie—he describes how he desirously imagines greater and greater possibilities while sometimes charmed, sometimes distraught by opium-use. But not all readers have viewed De Quincey as so emotionally volatile. In “The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes cites De Quincey as an unperturbed sort of being, as an example of the affectless “scriptor,” one who “no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book” (146–147). Meanwhile, in contrast to what Barthes would say about the passionless, humourless “scriptor,” De Quincey in the *Confessions* writes, “You will think, perhaps, that I am too confidential and communicative of my own private history. It may be so. But my way of writing is rather to think aloud, and follow my own humours” (69). Barthes argues that one who writes through imitations of an “immense dictionary” “no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions” (147), but De Quincey believes his narrative is shaped by his humours, his bodily inflected emotions—it just so happens that that his humours connect affectively to so much else (both literary and narcotic influence). De Quincey, the prime example of a Romantic reader, recognized his tendency to link himself to the

experience of otherness, and his *Confessions* shows him especially recognizing that tendency.

De Quincey is therefore difficult to categorize. He seems both Romantically inclined to follow his humours and also prone to viewing those humours as part of a web of readerly and opiate consumption, based on his readings of Wordsworth and Coleridge along with his narcotic adventures.⁷⁵ Joel Faflak, for one, contends that De Quincey's work represents a Victorian, clinical critique of Romantic concepts, an example of "how the Victorians react to an internalized Romanticism" (27). In his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*—especially in De Quincey's carefully noted dosage ("I now took only 1000 drops of laudanum per day" (61) and later, "the poison of 8000 drops of laudanum per day"(65))—we do find a clinical sort of experimentation. Such attitudes toward experiment had, however, already been embraced by those including Coleridge who experimented with nitrous oxide at the Pneumatic Institute under the guidance of Thomas Beddoes. This experimentation had been known to sustain Romantic poetic fervor.⁷⁶

Yet De Quincey, perhaps suggesting a pseudo-Victorian, pseudo-Romantic status, notes in the *Confessions* mixed results from his own experiments. By the end of the narrative, he seems to have clinically (in the manner of a proto-Victorian) learned something about the dangers of literal addiction, but he also has a dreadful, Coleridgean sense of more to come. "I triumphed," he writes about his reduction of opium intake, "but

⁷⁵ Alina Clej writes, "Nothing is more difficult than placing De Quincey's work within a literary movement or under a well-defined aesthetic rubric" (6).

⁷⁶ For more on this time, see Mike Jay's *Atmosphere of Heaven*. The scientific method of repeated (often delighted) experimentation exemplified by the work of Thomas Beddoes, Davy, and Coleridge at the Pneumatic Institute suggests ongoing, reiterative desire such as that described by Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry*, a desire whose "realization . . . does not consist in its being 'fulfilled,' 'fully satisfied,' it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular movement" (7).

think not, reader, that therefore my sufferings were ended” (87). He would continue to suffer at the time of the composition of the *Confessions*. He writes that “the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided: the legions that encamped in them are drawing off, but not all departed” (88). No matter how much is known, something more always remains in this literature of addiction, some potentially thrilling, fearful, or desired reiteration. The labyrinthine textual worlds De Quincey patterned after drug habits display an intensifying sense of the Romantic reader’s incessantly sought, imaginative possibility—intensifying to the point where categories like “Romantic” or “Victorian” are no longer as helpfully applicable as the aesthetic category of addiction.

The Possibilities of Habits

The intensity and attendant yearning of the habit informing his writing exemplifies De Quincey’s departure from the popular aesthetics of habit that had influenced him. De Quincey’s addiction aesthetic, while coming from a familiar, Romantic context, suggested new kinds of thinking about art by intensifying perception of its possibilities. De Quincey—an obsessive consumer of texts and opium, who described his habits linking him repeatedly to otherness and novelty—revised earlier senses of aesthetic habits that produce something more static than a continual adventure toward new developments.

Earlier Romantics, such as Wordsworth, had argued for the value of a more stable sort of habit in aesthetic experience. Wordsworth’s principle of writing in a state of tranquil recollection, a process that he describes in his preface to the 1800 second edition

of the *Lyrical Ballads*, requires habit that produces calm emotion, which he terms enjoyment:

. . . the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures . . . so . . . the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment. (183)

Although the mind eventually experiences an emotion similar to the one the poet wants to describe, this is only a mellow repetition—safer, ready for enjoyment—because the mind has continually, habitually processed it. Wordsworth chooses verse to convey such enjoyment, because, he argues in his *Lyrical Ballads* preface, “by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association” (172).⁷⁷ Habit in this case can secure familiarity, much like the habit and custom advocated by Edmund Burke.

Yet it is true that Burke—another hero of De Quincey’s—had related strangeness to repetitive behavior. In his text on the sublime, Burke outlines an aesthetic of repetition that suggests incomprehensible vastness. A “source of the sublime,” Burke writes, “is infinity,” which he proceeds to connect to reiteration (*Philosophical Enquiry* 64–67): “Whenever we repeat any idea frequently, the mind by a sort of mechanism repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate” (*Philosophical Enquiry* 67). Burke adds,

⁷⁷I here quote the 1800, second edition’s preface.

“This is the reason of an appearance very frequent in madmen; that they remain whole days and nights, sometimes whole years, in the constant repetition of some remark, some complaint, or song” (*Philosophical Enquiry* 67–68). This habit takes control of an individual, and it suggests some infinite power in its ongoing iterations.

Burke does, however, also assert that there were limits to all this strangeness linked to habit. He argues that the most sublime repetitions themselves do not change, even if they intimate infinity; in the *Philosophical Inquiry*, he writes, “Succession and *uniformity* of parts, are what constitute the artificial infinite” (68). Burke here describes repetition in uniformity as necessary for a variety of sublime experience

because if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check; you are presented at every alteration with the termination of one idea, and the beginning of another; by which means it becomes impossible to continue that uninterrupted progression, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity. (68)⁷⁸

This sublimity requires repetition that is steady, pure, and perfect—adjectives that have almost nothing to do with De Quincey.

⁷⁸ Burke, promoter of custom’s repetitions, believer in the sublimity of repetitions, did nonetheless recognize the threat of habits that in their potency might change things. While the contemporary sense of addiction was not a factor for him, he still alludes to intoxicants, including liquor and gas (in a passage obliquely referring to the work of the pneumatic chemists, who would count Coleridge among their experimenters), to characterize unrestrained revolutionary passion:

When I see the spirit of liberty in action, I see a strong principle at work; and this, for a while, is all I can possibly know of it. The wild *gas*, the fixed air, is plainly broke loose: but we ought to suspend our judgment until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared . . . (*Reflections* 90)

The tendency toward (mostly metaphorical) intoxication could, Burke feared, seize even traditional authority, which necessitated certain bracing measures: “To secure any degree of sobriety in the propositions made by the leaders in any public assembly, they ought to respect, in some degree perhaps to fear, those whom they conduct” (*Reflections* 129). Sobriety was not guaranteed in even customary authority; some fear, or at least a suggested jolt, would be needed to keep leaders walking a steadier line. And so, Burke *was* concerned with what something like regular intoxication might mean for customary power.

Burke asserted that habitual reiteration could provide a kind of stability, which had an aesthetic as well as a political dimension for him—he saw power in habitual, sublime reiteration.⁷⁹ As an admirer of Burke, De Quincey also prized sublimity as a means to, in his words, “power.” In an essay in which he praises Burke as a prophet, De Quincey explains this sort of power; he writes, “Many persons think Dr. Johnson the *exemplar* of conversational power. I think otherwise . . . far sooner I should look for such an *exemplar* in Burke” (“Conversation” 270). And De Quincey elsewhere describes powerful literature as Burke would describe sublimity, as a path for accessing infinity. See, for example, the following, from an essay on “The Poetry of Pope,” where De Quincey refers to power as an attribute of sublime Miltonic literature that links us to the infinite: “What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge,” De Quincey writes, “of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*,—that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite” (“The Poetry of Pope” 56).

But in that last quote we can also see De Quincey’s departure from Burke’s sense of sublimity or power. De Quincey notes that a million points merely sit on a flat and unpromising level without the Miltonic ability to pose links across differences, to suggest commonality and repetitive similarity from one plane to another and another. By posing links across differences, we might “expand sympathy” with otherness, and the ultimate otherness (the point beyond which there is no more otherness) is infinity. For De Quincey, Milton brings separate items into relation to things on different levels in a way that

⁷⁹ Fusion of social sympathy with authoritative sublimity in particular is Burke’s idea of successful governance; as Tim Fulford observes, “sympathy is directed by the careful arrangement of the performance towards the awestruck submissiveness that Burke makes a characteristic of the sublime response” (43).

guides the reader toward a more elevated, broader understanding, toward closer, emotional connection to the infinite. Such literature alters the reader's understanding consistently, and it does so through power that locates sympathetic repetitions between self and ultimate otherness (infinity). De Quincey saw sublime power in repetitions, but his repetitions appealed to changes and differences on their way toward linking the self sympathetically with infinity.

The sympathetic movement away from "the same earthly level" works in an addiction-like manner by repetitively leading to recognition of something new and previously unattained. There is a sense of growth in De Quincey's aesthetics of addiction-like repetition. In *Suspiria De Profundis*, De Quincey describes his own prose as constituted by a related, repetitive movement to novelty, by "those wandering musical variations upon the theme – those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb up with bells and blossoms round about the arid stock; ramble away from it at times with perhaps too rank a luxuriance" (97). Repetition and digression, reiterated theme and wandering variation, are insisted upon and formally present throughout De Quincey's texts on addiction, where he takes readers into the familiar recesses of the mind and then expands philosophically and hallucinatorily. J. Hillis Miller writes that De Quincey's essays "trickle off into digressive irrelevances, like a stream dispersing itself in sand. Rare is the work of his which pursues its announced course and reaches its predicted goal" (28). Yet Miller notes that De Quincey does not ever lose coherence: "if we look back over the pages we have just read we can find no place where the thread of connection was broken" (*Disappearance of God* 28). Continuity amid digression, a quality De Quincey

boasts to be the object of his confessional prose, is the same quality that he finds in his admired prose-writers like Burke (even if Burke saw sublimity work rather differently).

In different essays, De Quincey cites a tendency of Burke's language to develop, to grow, to move into new forms and meanings. "Burke's motion . . . was all a going forward," De Quincey notes in an essay on "Dr. Samuel Parr" (134). And in an essay on "Conversation," De Quincey praises what he sees as Burke's aesthetic of mutating, unstable repetition: "The very violence of a projectile as thrown by *him* caused it to rebound in fresh forms, fresh angles, splintering, coruscating, which gave out thoughts as new (and as startling) to himself as they are to his reader. In this power, which might be illustrated largely from the writings of Burke, is seen something allied to the powers of a prophetic seer" ("Conversation" 270). This is a rebounding in *fresh* forms; De Quincey is insisting on the productive power of rebounding repetitions. In his text modeled on addiction, he likewise would portray indelibly the possible worlds generated by especially desirous repetitions.⁸⁰

De Quincey is oriented toward a more mysterious sublime than Burke's; his is the Romantic sublime that Thomas Weiskel writes of as "a revelation of the unattainability of the Other" (163). Yet De Quincey maintains the earlier writer's interest in habit and routine, and thus there are several passages in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* where De Quincey describes his habit in terms of a repetitive exploration. For instance, there is the exacting observation of his increasing laudanum doses. Routine intoxication

⁸⁰ De Quincey also makes frequent mention of religious authors similarly capable of ambitiously digressive statements. In a later edition of the *Confessions*, De Quincey writes, "'Philosophy:' – At this point it is that the main misconception would arise. Theology, and not philosophy, most people will fancy, is likely to form the staple of [Donne, Chillingworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, Milton, South, Barrow]. But I have elsewhere maintained, that the main bulk of English philosophy has always hidden itself in the English divinity" (55). See Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1862).

guides his narrative in the most measured yet out-of-control of ways. De Quincey elsewhere in the *Confessions* compares himself to an explorer, processing new knowledge through his habitual examinations of his world's strangeness:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances: for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares, as must, I conceive, baffle the audacity of porters, and confound the intellects of hackney-coachmen. I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (53)

De Quincey's habits lead him to explore new, shadowy places full of mystery, places always coming into vividly narrated being with every additionally articulated observation. He describes himself as "observing" on multiple "rambles," using established disciplinary guidelines such as those of "nautical principles." He attempts to untangle, like a committed researcher, "knotty problems" and "enigmatical . . . riddles." These problems are all those of a mysterious world, of "alleys," "entries," and "streets"—his scientifically repetitive exploration leads him to a sense of places loaded with possibility. This is not Burke's ideal world of habit and custom; De Quincey draws from language of

routine that conveys exploratory digression—his is the language of the Romantic reader and the Romantic scientist. The terms of addiction have provided De Quincey a suitable vehicle for articulating and intensifying the combination of a Romantic, mass-culture-consuming reader’s routine diversion and the Romantic scientist’s routine exploration.⁸¹ Thus does De Quincey develop an addict’s sublime (an aesthetic of long-lasting vitality, judging by the existence and title of Richard Klein’s 1993 book, *Cigarettes Are Sublime*).

De Quincey was not the first to reflect on regular intoxication and see the suggestion of a union between imaginative digression and regular intellectual exploration. Coleridge had experimented regularly with nitrous oxide at the Pneumatic Institute and saw poetry and science as related due to their similar orientation toward the possible.⁸² Richard Holmes, in *The Age of Wonder*, describes the nitrous-oxide-inhaling Humphry Davy’s scientific method, too, which combined wild intoxication with routine habits. Holmes writes of Davy’s nitrous oxide use that “in many of his extreme experiments Davy had deliberately pushed himself into unconsciousness, and he knew this could be done without harm” (282). This was repeated, conscious investigation of the sublime unknown, of unconsciousness. Given such developments in Coleridge’s circle, the combination of science and addiction in imaginative literature may seem to have been inevitable for the Romantics once addiction became increasingly recognized, and De Quincey—himself a repeater, a Coleridgean copier who yearned to produce works of

⁸¹ When these repetitive digressions are applied to De Quincey’s story of repetitive digression in addiction, form joins with content—and De Quincey believed in the value of a coincidence of the two. He maintains, in part four of his “Style” pieces, that “style, or, in the largest sense, *manner*, is confluent with the matter” (227). He is also explicit about the scientific ramifications of this literary aesthetic in his “Style” essays. There, in part four, he compares imaginative literary endeavor to a “subjective science,” created out of the solitary subject’s mind in order to understand better how that mind makes sense of its world (220). This subjective science—suggesting Nietzsche’s Dionysianism—works through repetitive digression to reveal the mind’s nature and imaginative capabilities.

⁸² Or, more specifically, toward hope. See Coleridge, *Letters* I.557.

literary genius—was especially ready to embrace an aesthetic strategy of ardent repetitions that lead to surprising otherness.

Freud, writing about repetition compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, argues that behavioral reiterations serve a fundamental drive toward something rather worse than knowledge of possibility: death. He relates repetition to human instinct, describing how instinct moves “to restore an earlier state of things” (43). The first Freudian instinct, then, is to return to the earliest instant, or “the inanimate state,” which in turn would suggest that “the aim of all life is death” (46). For De Quincey, behavioral and linguistic repetitions did seem at times to work similarly to Freudian compulsions. Writing about addiction leads De Quincey in his *Confessions* to repeat and recall, as each iteration relates to those that preceded it, combining anteriority with later thoughts and hallucinations. He hallucinates at last in the *Confessions* about antiquity, about a nearly ultimate “earlier state,” after many rounds of drug use, and he is terrified especially by the vast time preceding his repetitions.⁸³ “The mere antiquity of Asiatic things,” he writes, “of their institutions, histories, modes of faith, &c. is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual” (81).

Yet De Quincey’s figures for infinity or anteriority are rarely fully suggestive of his own death—they are realms in which one can get lost, places for losing oneself in the strangeness linked to the familiar. De Quincey had become a writer in the company of Romantic experimenters and amid the overflow of mass-produced texts in the early nineteenth century, and he located in repetitive experience something other than Enlightenment stability or Freudian death: a field densely filled with potential.

⁸³ Kierkegaard, in *Repetition*, observes the way repetition brings past and future together; he writes, “Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward” (131).

The Addict's Labyrinth

I now want to examine more closely one particular DeQuinceyan realm: the endless Piranesi labyrinth, where repetitively familiar, infinitely replicating staircases continually contort toward more and more. At one point in the *Confessions*, De Quincey characterizes his opium-altered condition by relating it to Giovanni Piranesi's *Carceri*—to an image of endless staircases. De Quincey had not seen the image, but Coleridge had, and it had haunted the addicted poet's "visions" (78). Accordingly, De Quincey compares his own literary representation of Piranesi's labyrinth to his experience of addiction. He reflects on the vicariously seen image in addiction-like terms, using language of recurrence that bridges the internal with the external by moving from second to third to first person. The baroque passage needs to be quoted in its entirety:

Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase, and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld: and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper

gloom of the hall. – With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams. (78)

The passage enacts what it describes, winding through repetitions linguistically as it denotes repetitious, winding stairs. Participles appear again and again, creeping, groping, standing, and aspiring, each conveying a struggle to move through an imagined domain that will never resolve itself into total clarity, never move from “aspiring” to “attained.” The method matches De Quincey’s ideals of sublime, powerful prose that repeats and digresses—the addiction-like passage here realizes an intense version of what his Romantic-reader aesthetic called for. And the lines are, emphatically, addiction-like—they are given not merely to represent a sole hallucination, but to provide an analogue for an ongoing condition, an endless procession of distressing sensations and thoughts.

Appropriately enough for an image of addiction, a tyrannical element persists in the Piranesi passage, too, in language of compulsion, of imperative verbs—“follow,” “suppose,” “raise.” The verbs repeatedly direct the reader’s thoughts; the language *compels* the reader to imagine endless possibility through intensely dense patterns. There are other addiction-like attributes in this passage, too, and they also show, through their linguistic recurrence, possibility expanding: the union between internal selfhood and external architecture, for instance, becomes blurred repetitively. Second person, third person, and first person blend together, from the “you” who reflects on Piranesi to Piranesi himself in the maze to the authorial “I” whose mind works like that maze: all combine to present mind and otherness melting into one another as we follow the course of those participles and imperatives. The observer becomes directed by the observed, changed by what is studied; De Quincey becomes Piranesi, “with the same power of

endless growth and self-reproduction” in the architecture of his dreams—and the reader, following De Quincey through his winding thoughts, is termed the “you” that De Quincey has been as well, when he was the vicarious viewer of the Piranesi image.

Here, in the labyrinth of the addict’s imagination, self and other meet repeatedly, and so do the vast and the tiny, as the staircases replicate while simultaneously compressing the reader-viewer’s attention into a maze.⁸⁴ Hayter observes that architecture is referred to more than other art-forms in the work of the opium-using poets, and the spaces of such architecture are predominantly vast, or labyrinthine—including the “huge flights of stairs” (89).⁸⁵ These are spaces suggestive of enhanced possibility, however repetitive they are; these are addiction-like places for repetitive urges toward more.

De Quincey was himself quite aware of the peculiar new possibilities found in space via his drugged investigations. He comments in the *Confessions of an English*

⁸⁴ Others have noted how repetitions operated through science and culture to chart similarly vexed global space in the nineteenth century. Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter Kitson write in *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era* of a knowledge “instrumental as much as theoretical: it told people how to repeat what others had already done. In particular, it showed them how to go to foreign places and to come back safely—by systematising what the first successful explorers had done and seen” (27). Habits established precedence that solidified understandings of space and place, allowing the individual explorer to pursue with some connection to what came before, and thus to return to the familiar even while venturing into the new. De Quincey, however, collapses the enormous with the familiarly small-scale. In *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey*, John Barrell relates De Quincey’s unsettled/unsettling nature to an overwhelming anxiety the opium-eater has regarding Asia:

The argument of this book is not simply that De Quincey expresses and intensifies the fears that govern his perceptions of his private life by representing the objects of his fear as oriental . . . My argument is also . . . that he expresses and rationalises his fears of the Orient by treating the history and politics of India, China and elsewhere as a series of narratives which seem to repeat those of his mythologised personal history. (76)

De Quincey’s health concerns are his geopolitical concerns, in other words. The relationship between Orientalism and opium use in De Quincey’s writing has also been covered by Barry Milligan in *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* and by Nigel Leask in *British Romantic Writers and the East*.

⁸⁵ Hayter notes many related clichés of addiction literature, often ones that involve bridging a position of isolation with something enormous, such as the “intention but failure to write a great philosophical work” (27) and “the pleasure-dome, the airy music, the sorceress, the half-living statue, the embracing lovers in the icy wind” (102). She emphasizes opium itself and its intoxicating properties as the cause of these dreams, but I am arguing that De Quincey uses, specifically, the repetitive structure of addiction and addiction-like thinking to shape those spaces that Hayter finds central to the literature of opium use.

Opium-Eater, “The sense of space, and in the end, the sense of time, were both powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive” (76). Yet, again, there is minuteness in such experience—these alterations occur in his head, even though it seems that “[s]pace swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity” (76). The collision of infinity and mental solitude—the individual’s personalized experience of enormity arising from endless contemplation of possibility—characterizes both the addiction-like labyrinth De Quincey represents in the Piranesi passage and the aesthetic power he sought as a writer and reader.

In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag describes metaphorical uses of illness for discussing cultural problems. She writes that “our views about cancer, and the metaphors we have imposed on it, are so much a vehicle for the large insufficiencies of this culture” (87). Yet addiction in De Quincey’s case (as well as in the world of *The Big Sleep*) does not so simply represent a cultural problem. Nor is addiction in these cases strictly a metaphor. Addiction models the kind of patterns De Quincey both deploys in his *Confessions* and loves as an aesthete. These are linguistic patterns that convey evolving, repetitive pursuit of exaggerated possibility. Such addiction-like formal devices, as we see in De Quincey’s Piranesi scene, forge labyrinthine worlds of potential endlessness.

Obviously, repetitive forms can stultify or madden—think of any mind-numbing commercial jingle or the shrieking insistence of a neglected car alarm—but De

Quincey's work reminds us that they don't necessarily have that effect. Writers have recognized this continually since De Quincey published his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*; Jorge Luis Borges, an avowed admirer of De Quincey, brought De Quinceyan strategies of repetitious pursuit into the creation of his own fictions of labyrinths, of endless reading and interpreting and recreating and seeking. Such addiction-like aesthetic experience, through its repetitions, sustains a desire-like, speculative orientation, an orientation that supports enhanced contemplation of potentiality without all the problems of literal addiction.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ For examples of the Borgesian interest in De Quincey, see some of the references to the opium-eater listed in the index of Borges's *Selected Non-Fictions* (551); also of note in this same collection is Borges's essay on "The Labyrinths of the Detective Story and Chesterton," in which he explicitly links those labyrinths to "appetite" (of different varieties) (112).

CHAPTER 4

INSATIABLE SEEKERS IN THE DOUBLE POEM: ALFRED TENNYSON, CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, AND THE AFFECTING EXPERIMENTS OF FICTIONAL ADDICTS

In 1874, Alfred Tennyson wrote of a “waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone”:

This has generally come upon me thro’ repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seems to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words . . . (Hallam Tennyson I.320)

Linguistic repetition intimated boundlessness, Tennyson claimed, throughout his life, “up from boyhood.” Habitually repeating words did not, as one might expect, impose limits on his thinking. Instead he found great potential coiled in the constraints of ongoing pattern, potential for recognizing “the weirdest of the weirdest,” or that which is “utterly beyond words.”

The above passage resonates with Tennyson’s earlier poetry, too, as this chapter will show. There, in the poetry, we find examples of another repetitive experience that leads to sustained pondering of grander possibility; in poems such as “The Lotos-Eaters” and *The Princess*, Tennyson specifically portrays addictive consumption that compels addicts to consider more and more experiences, and thus moves them toward some

reflection on their worlds' potential. The patterns of addiction, moreover, constitute the patterns of Tennyson's poetic forms and the patterns by which his characters articulate understanding of their world. Tennyson's readers, then, are offered addiction-like experiences through language; the reader is repeatedly directed to ponder possibility without the physiological or psychological threat of literal addiction. Tennyson's lotos-eaters, on the other hand, do not inhabit some paradise of infinite awareness; they are sluggish, trapped, and isolated. Yet they find at least some music, hope, and pleasure on their island, an aesthetic consolation in their world both explored and articulated in terms of their addictive habits. And the poetry derived from their experience provides a sober and more conscious access to the kind of thinking the lotos-eaters access unhealthily.

That combination of rigidly habitual thinking and creative potential has been cited as a structuring principle in a great deal of Victorian poetry. Isobel Armstrong has described this principle in terms of the Victorian "double poem"—the poem that presents standardized, consensus thinking while offering "the *possibility* of challenging . . . consensus through the double-reading" (16; emphasis added). These double poems are poems of contradictions, of reified habits that suggest creative re-patterning, of (in the terms of this dissertation) addicts whose condition produces addiction-like forms for potent thinking outside the strictures of addiction. In what follows I describe one particular tradition of that double poetry emerging with regard to addiction discourse. I focus on two Victorian poets: Tennyson and Christina Rossetti. Both were committed to ideals of stable, reiterated experience that contribute to the acquisition of greater truth—religious ritual appealed to Rossetti, and Tennyson had an interest in the scientific method. Both were also drawn to tropes of addiction. They both produced double poems

with regard to a revised view, sanctioned by addiction discourse, of reiterated experience, the view of habitual behaviors as both stable and not, bound and boundless, always the same and always—for the desirous repeater—constituting a movement toward possibility and difference. While negotiating such contradictions, these poets made use of what I refer to as addiction-like forms—forms that offer addiction’s intensely repetitive orientation toward the possible without the risks of the condition itself. Writers like Tennyson and Rossetti clearly disassociated literal addiction from the addiction-like aesthetic experience of their exploratory, repetitive poems. They did so by displaying literal addiction as chiefly harmful while presenting the addiction-like obtained in their poetry as a way of living thoughtfully in a world of both repetitive actuality and wild possibility.

As discussed in previous chapters, both science and pleasurable pursuit were frequently understood in the nineteenth-century in terms of habits by which we work toward something more, and addictive self-experimenting clarified the fundamental similarity between the two. To explore how Tennyson and Rossetti registered that similarity, I will first consider how Tennyson joined experimental repetitions with aesthetic ones—specifically, how he described addiction-like repetition that always proceeds toward possibility in both pursuits of pleasure and in experimental pursuits of meaning and knowledge. Addiction, as represented in Tennyson’s poems such as *The Princess* and “The Lotos-Eaters,” models addiction-like patterns for pursuit of both knowledge and aesthetic experience, patterns that the reader (rather than the represented addicts) can make the most of. Next, this chapter will consider another poetic approach to addiction, one that more specifically addresses how ongoing commercial consumption

intimates much more; this is the approach we see in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. There, habit-forming consumption also brings with it worldly knowledge while providing useful literary patterns for further imaginative thinking and speaking.

The point here is that, in the case of either "The Lotos-Eaters" or *Goblin Market*, aesthetic and knowledge-producing encounters with possibility merge through addictive habits, yet those habits ultimately prove disastrous; both poems, consequently, present instead addiction-*like* patterns of poetic language as superior paths toward that aesthetic/epistemological experience. While addictive habits entrap, they also suggest (in a contradictory, double-poem kind of way) patterns for repetitive encounters with possibility. Writers like Tennyson and Rossetti drew from those patterns for ambitiously poetic ends, provoking reflection on a world in which habit and its opposite so often join.

Tennyson and Addiction

Herbert Tucker in *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* uses the term "addictive" to characterize a persistent hunger in Tennyson's poetry; he writes of Tennyson's attraction to the theme of "the addictive narcissism of erotic idealization" (97), for example, and describes the "addictive momentum" demanded as "the Tennysonian self requires continuous effort for its preservation" (126). This momentum went beyond poetry: Tennyson was no stranger to addiction in his personal life. A famed smoker (there has even been a "Tennyson" brand of cigars), the poet also had a bleak family history of alcoholism. Ann Colley writes that Tennyson had "a nagging fear that the unstable Dr. Tennyson [his father] was consciously drinking himself to death" (36). Dr. Tennyson suffered from "schirrus" of the liver, indicative of alcoholism (Ricks 5). And the doctor's son would strive to refute slanderous suggestions that he was himself

addicted to narcotics. Yet, for all Tennyson's own "attempts to allay rumors," writes Roger Platizky, his "outward appearance . . . along with his artistic temperament, habitual pipe smoking, and trance-like imagery, all lent themselves to his unwelcome characterization as a possible drug user" (209).

Addiction—whatever the terminology used to describe drug habits—was a reality and genuine worry for Tennyson, in other words, yet he maintained a conviction in the poetic possibility offered by overpowering repetition, that possible access to "the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words." Reconciling worries about addiction with a happy view of repetitive literature might not seem like a difficulty at all; we might remind ourselves that addiction and poetic repetition are quite different things. But those in the nineteenth-century who had read De Quincey, who were familiar with popular concerns about overindulgent reading habits, and who were cognizant of certain details of Coleridge's life had registered a link between literary repetitions and addictive repetitions. If they had read De Quincey especially closely, however, they also saw ways in which one might write about addiction while providing access to addiction-like forms through which one can think more intensely about possibility. They might have seen, as Tennyson did, addiction-like methods for attaining knowledge of possibility and aesthetic pleasure, and they might have, as Tennyson did, show addiction-like behaviors structuring poetry that allows for intensified, repetitive appreciation of the possibilities in materiality.

And in fact, Tennyson was a great admirer of De Quincey, holding the opium-eater's prose in highest regard, calling it "as fine as any verse" (Hallam Tennyson II.414). Like De Quincey, too, Tennyson had an interest in exploratory thinking that matched his aesthetic ideals. According to his son, Hallam Tennyson, "While he talked of the

mysteries of the universe, his face, full of the strong lines of thought, was lighted up”:

When conversing with my brother and myself or our college friends, he was, I used to think, almost at his best, for he would quote us the fine passages from ancient or modern literature and show us why they are fine, or he would tell us about the great facts and discoveries in Astronomy, Geology, Botany, Chemistry . . . (II.408)

This is an appreciation of science with strikingly affective properties, an appreciation that causes the face to “light up” and accompanies aesthetic concerns relating to ancient and modern literature.

Tennyson linked art and science frequently—a linkage that he describes in terms of incessant (addiction-like) hunger in, for example, *The Princess*. There, a prince, who with his friends has infiltrated the women’s academy overseen by Princess Ida, avidly attends lectures in an amphitheatre, hearing talks of “[e]lectric, chemic laws” (II.362) mixed with “quoted odes” (II.355) and “scraps of thunderous epic” (II.353). The prince remarks that he and his friends took in this mix of poetry and science with something comparable to physical hunger: “like three horses that have broken fence” who “glutted all night long breast-deep in corn” (II.364–365). Ravenous appetite is a simile for delighted intellectual curiosity here. In this passage we see, fully formed, Tennyson’s fusion of aesthetic pleasure with science in addiction-like, intensely appetitive terms.

Tennyson clearly saw scientific progress in his poetry of thirsty pursuit. In a letter to Edward Moxon in 1844, he writes, about Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, “it seems to contain many speculations with which I have been familiar for years, and on which I have written more than one poem” (Lang and Shannon

I.230, qtd Zimmerman 70). More recently, a number of scholars have explored the connection between Tennyson and science. Tennyson's "scientific readers," notes John Holmes, "frequently identified him as wholeheartedly in [science's] favor" (656).⁸⁷ *In Memoriam*, particularly, is full of imagery and patterns that recall Lyell's geology (Tomko; Zimmerman 67). Jason Rudy describes how science permeated Tennyson's broader, social concerns, as well; he writes that in 1833, Tennyson "attended the third annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science" and took this as an opportunity for political reflection, for "at least part of the inspiration for the British Association was the desire to mediate the political turmoil of the day" (Rudy 46).

More encounters with scientific associations awaited the poet. Tennyson "was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1865" and his nomination "declares him to be 'attached to Science & anxious to promote its progress'" (J. Holmes 658). John Holmes argues that this reception from the scientific community was due to the poet's aesthetic production as much as any social ideals for scientific advancement. What qualified Tennyson as a science-inclined poet seems, Holmes writes, to have less to do with specific scientific inquiries or achievements than with his "minute and detailed observation of nature" (661).⁸⁸

Other critics have recognized the close observation and continual skepticism of the scientist in Tennyson's poetry; as Christopher Ricks has observed, "Tennyson is supremely a poet of doubt" (128). Embedded in the Princess's world of aesthetically charged learning, the Prince wonders, "do I chase / The substance or the shadow? Will it

⁸⁷ Holmes names Thomas Henry Huxley and the astronomer Norman Lockyer as examples. Huxley had called Tennyson "the only poet since the time of Lucretius, who has taken the trouble to understand the work and tendency of the men of science" (L. Huxley II: 359).

⁸⁸ Jason Rudy particularly notes the formal effects of Tennyson's scientifically, physiologically engaged poetry—poetry in which "readers are asked to imagine communication as physiologically felt" (Rudy 62).

hold?” (II.386–387) That endlessly skeptical pursuit of aesthetic pleasure and mysterious knowledge characterizes another work of Tennyson’s, his “Lotos-Eaters,” in which such a pursuit also becomes plainly addictive. The island of Tennyson’s lotos-eaters is a lurid poetic domain of aesthetic languor, habitual pondering, and narcotic listlessness. Aidan Day notes a related, skeptical ambiguity in the poem, where “it is precisely the absence of any settled scheme of thought and belief that constitutes the conceptual framework” (38).⁸⁹

Lotos-Eaters

“The Lotos-Eaters” clarifies the addiction-like properties of Tennysonian, skeptical-aesthetic experience. The poem tells of an island known through alluringly addictive physical experience—specifically through consumption of the island’s lotus that attracts the eaters, makes them groggy, and guides them about without leading them to a “settled scheme.” This is the basic way in which Tennyson’s eaters explore and poetically articulate their new locale, and their desired lotos has seemed a rather obvious opiate-analogue to readers. Life on the lotos-island proves deeply narcotic. Among its notable features is the ledge where “the poppy hangs in sleep” (56).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Alan Sinfield describes anxiety in Tennyson’s poetic pursuit of metaphysical certainty, of some firm grounding for identity and being: “Tennyson’s concern with his own name, and with the possible existence of ‘the Nameless’, appears as an anxiety about the constructedness of reality in language, and as an attempt to move beyond it” (236).

⁹⁰ Isobel Armstrong notes that Tennyson’s lotos-eaters match opium-eaters: “It is no accident that the mariners’ need for the Lotos is to allay the horrors of labour, for opium was often taken by industrial workers for the same reason” (87). Catherine Barnes Stevenson adduces a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that Tennyson was thinking specifically of De Quincey and opium when he wrote “The Lotos-Eaters.” This includes Tennyson’s family problems with the condition. “About four years before,” writes Stevenson, “his father, George Clayton Tennyson, began taking opium (in the form of laudanum)” (119). “Dr. Tennyson, whose violent, erratic behavior and heavy drinking made his family’s life insufferable from the mid-1820s to his death in 1831, seems to have continued to use laudanum throughout this period” (Stevenson 120).

In this, a most direct poetic depiction of addictive experience, an unreachable home evades Tennyson's group of stranded Homeric sailors. They fall into a fantastical indolence, establishing a new sense of place in language characterized by their condition:

Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, "We will return no more;"
And all at once they sang, "Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam." (41–45)

Something persistently remains beyond the horizon: the sturdier grounding of home. But addictive consumption has brought these mariners into a new, addiction-like social context. In the above passage, alliteratively sensory language emphasizes physical sameness even as novel meaning and emotional significance develop: "weary seem'd the sea," we are told, in language of exhaustion overloaded with sameness, with internal rhyming and alliterative sibilance.

The poem could end here, perhaps in despair at this addictive state. Much scholarship on the poem does characterize the stagnancy of its drugged eating (Armstrong describes it as a numbed response to labor, for instance (87)). But instead of allowing its narrative to end with an expression of addiction's dominance, the poem offers a close study of the island in flavorful, physical terms, as the sailors settle into their addicted condition rather more thoughtfully. They begin to notice things to which their addiction directs them:

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak,
The Lotos blows by every winding creek;

All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone;
Thro' every hollow cave and alley lone
Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-dust is blown. (145–
149)

Blooming and blowing, the lotos gives patterned form to the island. Through strongly alliterative language, that repetitive physical action is recreated as poetry. Here, too, is a sensed mellowness in physical constancy, allowing the place to be drowsily felt as well as understood. The poet describes that felt constancy and monotony, the most repetitive sort of quotidian existence: “All day the wind breathes low,” passing “[t]hro’ every hollow cave and alley lone,” carrying with it the lotos. And yet the habitués’ habitual attention runs to discrete entities. The sameness of their languorous efforts leads their thoughts to difference. Hollow caves, lone alleys: these are physical zones of isolation and separateness explored here through language of uniformity.

Such knowledge of particular physical reality comes about not simply by way of addiction, but through poetic form patterned after addiction. Consider the repeated mention of the lotos, the “round and round” of the lotos-dust pursued by drugged eaters—in such passages, the eaters’ addictive desire for sensory, reiterated experience expresses itself in patterns that give communicable, structured form to the field of details the hungry eaters encounter. These inhabitants see themselves as ancient gods, who “find a music centred in doleful song / Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong, / Like a tale of little meaning tho’ the words are strong” (162–164). Song might “steam up” to those on this island, poetry can emerge from material location in material terms, with dramatic possibility made apparent to them through aesthetic experience. For though

this island is described as “land where all things seem’d the same” (24), there is also great apparent material difference and possibility, evident in all the suggestive physical details that the eaters recognize in their habitual pursuit. Many of these details, described carefully, promise so much more, intimate possibility useful for poetic imagination, because such physical properties conceal as “veils” or only partly break through “waving lights”—this is

A land of streams! Some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro’ waving lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below. (10–14)

The alluring island may produce and reproduce sameness, then, but its allure also guides the sailors to study their island in terms of particularity that lead them to sense and speak of more than just sameness. There are risks that come with living and studying in this way—the island can be a melancholic, at times frightfully isolating place, and the eaters sing dolefully. Yet those same lotos-eaters can also smile and declare that “sweet music here . . . softer falls / Than petals from blown roses on the grass” (46–47).

Even when it seems the lotos-eaters speak of slipping wholly into drugged stupor, they continue to learn things and articulate what they know lyrically. Their addiction thus becomes both poetic and in a way scientifically useful. The eaters can reflect on

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream!
To dream, and dream, like yonder amber light,

Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height

To hear each other's whisper'd speech (99–104)

The lotos-eaters fall into sweet sleep, but that sleep suggests the amber light cast upon the myrrh bush; it is a dreamy experience of material specifics, a sense of materiality loaded with possibility, with the fluctuating properties of hallucination and the specificity of empirical observation. If the lotos-eaters are sleeping, who else is there to register the richness of these natural details but the poet and the reader? The real epistemological/aesthetic rewards go to those who can have a merely addiction-like, readerly experience of this island. The addicts cannot return home; they are bogged down in their longing. The reader, on the other hand, has options, expanded now through an intensified encounter with material possibility.

Shelley, Tennyson, and Romantic Longing

Tennyson's representation of addiction brings to mind his poetic debts to an earlier poet who thought about intemperate habit—the teetotaling, diet-obsessed Percy Shelley, who had earlier reflected on aesthetic habits that might alter the world and shape knowledge of it. Shelley wrote of the risks and rewards that attended an aesthetic epistemology of habit. He had depicted poetic idealists and monstrous tyrants whose power, in either case, came from the ability to manipulate affecting patterns that could give form to the material world—those who could legislate through language's patterns. Through the character of Count Cenci and in his own essays on vegetarianism, Shelley described such patterns as especially destructive when associated with selfish, tyrannical evils the poet had discerned in carnivorous predation and alcohol abuse. That sinister

version of poetic pattern affected Tennyson, it seems; Michael O'Neill and Christopher Ricks have observed passages in which Tennyson recalls Shelley's demonic addict as the dark side of a poet. "Tennyson," writes O'Neill, "when his 'light is low', has an appalled knowledge of a shadow self and that knowledge is pointed up by the echo of Cenci's words" (184).

O'Neill, following Ricks, cites echoes in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* of Cenci's especially physiological claim that "My blood is running up and down my veins; / A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle: / I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe" (IV.i.163–5). Those Tennysonian echoes read as follows:

Be near me when my light is low,
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
And tingle; and the heart is sick,
And all the wheels of Being slow. (II. 1–4)

Both Shelley's deranged addict and Tennyson's disturbed, melancholic poet derive a sick energy from routine bodily experience. Both live through a Gothic aesthetic experience comprising compulsive, bodily habits. This is physiological poetry of the kind Jason Rudy has described—blood creeps, nerves prick and tingle, and the stanza becomes formed by recurring emphasis on physiological phenomena. The passage is a low point for the poet, or more specifically for Tennyson's "light," but Tennyson swerves from the Cencian to more outwardly directed, thoughtful patterns, asking for another to "be near me," rather than reveling too long in isolation, as the self-obsessed Count Cenci would ultimately hope to do.

But, whether slyly protecting his image or actually in denial, Tennyson rejected

the notion that he had a debt to Shelley; he did, however, acknowledge his admiration of the earlier poet (see O'Neill 183 and 194–195). And Michael O'Neill has detailed precisely where terms and ideas run through shared language from Shelley to Tennyson, especially with regard to a fascination with a lack of surcease. For both poets, this emphasis on endless recurrence can lead to despair (see: the miseries caused by the incessantly predatory Count Cenci or Tennyson's devastating melancholy) but both maintain hope in the possibility that endlessness suggests. O'Neill notices how "in Shelley, attention is focused on hope rather than attainment, on hope's endlessly various modes of coming into being" (O'Neill 192). It's a tendency that anticipates those closing lines of Tennyson's "Ulysses": "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (70).

Shelley and Tennyson also exhibited a shared fascination with emotionally charged, repetitively experimental pursuit. Tennyson participated in a scientific association and claimed to have, over the course of decades, frequently repeated words in a way that suggested a near-infinity of possibility, while Shelley studied not just physiology, but chemistry and other experimental sciences during the course of his own poetic development. In other words, both saw poetic sublimity in habitually, repetitively experimental experience of material reality. Tennyson, notes O'Neill, considers in his elegiac poetry such as *In Memoriam* "the meaninglessness that may lurk at the back of creation, but his anguish is unimaginable without Shelley's sense of the 'vacancy' ([Mont Blanc] I. 144) that would yawn, were it not for the imperiled 'human mind's imaginings' ([Mont Blanc] I. 143) that are dependent on and constitutive of the very materialist 'secret strength of things' (I. 139) which his poetry has conjured into being" (O'Neill

195–196). “Mont Blanc” and *In Memoriam* (as well as “Lotos-Eaters”) reflect similarly on that grandly undefined or unattained potentiality within material actuality.

Addiction was, however, a real threat for both Shelley’s and Tennyson’s sense of a world known through sensitivity to possibility. Addiction is the diseased version of the repetitive pursuit they both embraced as aesthetically promising, the life-destroying version of routine questing through materiality. Nevertheless, in the work of both poets, addiction’s habits remain overshadowed by whatever it is that the addict cannot wholly consume. The reflective, thoughtful Beatrice defeats Count Cenci, for example, and the Tennysonian knower might reach a more lucid sense of the world’s generous fullness by way of addiction-like patterns.

Yet Tennyson does not simply mirror Shelley in his sense of repetitive possibility-pursuit, and the difference between the two poets says a great deal about the development of popular addiction discourse in the nineteenth century. Shelley warned about alcohol habits and, troubled by them, devised healthier habits of sobriety that might use the power of addiction without the attendant loss of will. By Tennyson’s day, addiction had come to be increasingly and more directly associated with De Quincey, and De Quincey was not the only one to see investigative pursuit of possibility through the patterns of addiction. Tennyson’s erudite Princess uses language of habitual enslavement and drinking to describe a movement toward liberating knowledge:

Knowledge is now no more a fountain seal’d!

Drink deep, until the habits of the slave,

The sins of emptiness, gossip and spite

And slander, die. (II.76–79)

Intellectually fulfilling consumption, metaphorically “drinking deeply” with a *conscious* aesthetic sense of materiality (such as those “chemic, electric” matters studied through odes and epic language at the Princess’s university), might cure enslaved habits, according to the Princess. The cure here is strongly suggestive of the illness—of addiction or habitual enslavement—but the resulting consciousness allows a broader perspective than the addict’s. Both Tennyson’s Princess and Shelley’s Beatrice appeal to more critically aware patterns of monotony; they seek healthier responses to addiction by way of ongoing poetic patterns that affectively encourage expanded awareness.

Tennyson’s poetry just shows those patterns stemming a little more directly from addiction, rather than as a sober response to addiction. The lotos-eaters convert their addictive feelings into poetic song, for example, by which the reader may benefit from addiction-like experience. Unlike Shelley’s heroine, the lotos-eaters are themselves addicts; the lotos-eaters create what they can and understand what they do through their unhealthy habits, and the result is something rather more thoughtful than mere intoxication.

Addiction for the lotos-eaters is thus both a damaging condition and a model for poetic enlightenment, both a stultifying habit and an inspiration for conscious exploration. These contradictions make the poem a crucial example of what Armstrong would call the double poem, the poem of dual, ambiguously resolvable meanings that she finds central to Victorian poetics. The double poem “draws attention to the fact that meaning *is* decided by cultural consensus even while its ambiguity offers the possibility of challenging that consensus through the double-reading” (Isobel Armstrong 16). “The Lotos-Eaters,” similarly, draws attention to addiction as a health problem while offering

the possibility that such unhealthy habits can still support awareness that comes from pleasurable pursuit of knowledge through repeated experience. The poem replays consensus creatively, finding a consensus version of addiction rich with possibility, rich with intimations strangeness.

Tennyson wrote after De Quincey, after the rise of Romantic periodicals, at a time when addiction-like habits had suggested literary potential to many.⁹¹ Through his addicted lotus-eaters, then, he could address that potential made clear by one of his era's dominant aesthetic epistemologies, that of periodical culture, wherein one would pleurably derive information about difference and possibility through habitual experience.⁹² This periodical mode, so deeply DeQuinceyan, supports Tennyson's

⁹¹ Jon Klancher describes how repetitive, desirous experimenting was the basic project of the Romantic periodicals emerging at the same time as De Quincey's career as a writer for periodicals. Mass periodical culture thus arose in Britain along with De Quincey's more positive strain of addiction discourse, both inextricably tied to each other as commercially inscribed habits of desirous pursuit. Those who study the emergence of periodicals consistently characterize it in terms of insatiable repetition. Klancher writes that for *Blackwood's*, "the 'power of thought'—and the style that confirms it—reveals itself by a repetitive but intensifying reach after that 'inaccessible nucleus' of meaning (59). This, as Jon Mee points out, is part of how a "print culture endlessly echoes its own empty impulses" (Mee 61). The endless echoes make possible and cement certain recurring tropes that a culture hopes can give meaning to the repetitive noise. Klancher writes, "Both readers and writers searched the empire of signs for a map, a stance, a code with which to grasp historical transformation and a middle-class audience's role in it. The master-sign discourse [such as, Klancher notes earlier, "mechanism" as Carlyle uses the term] represents this search most recognizably for a later-twentieth-century reader because it remains today so popular a form of social criticism for a middle-class reading audience" (73). Addiction, most mechanical and repetitive of all, was positioned to become the master of all master-tropes, a popular tool for understanding how understanding works in a world of repetitively consumed mass media, intensified consumption of surplus goods, and sympathetic habits of communication.

⁹² The periodicals established in the Romantic era would structure addictive reading (and in De Quincey's case, actually apply the form of addictive experience, as I describe in chapter three). These were some of the most influential British publications of the century, including: *Blackwood's* (the Tory home for much of De Quincey's work), *Fraser's* (publisher of canonical Victorians such as Carlyle), the *Edinburgh Review* (the leading voice of reaction against Wordsworth-and-Coleridge Romanticism), and the *Westminster Review* (which published work of Utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and which later in the century would publish George Eliot), all founded between 1800 and 1830. David Stewart's *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture* describes how a boom in magazine publishing was a uniquely Romantic phenomenon—and one of the chief ways in which Romanticism initiated popular culture. Developments such as the steam press had further sped up the publication process by the 1830s (see Klancher 88). Commercial circulating libraries such as Mudie's also drove new, serialized literature, expanding rapidly in the mid-Victorian period (Hoppen 386). Charles Mudie developed the clout to influence the novels he circulated, particularly limiting narrative emphasis on that which could be interpreted as immoral, in response to what he viewed as basic audience concerns (Hoppen 386). Readers'

nuanced take on addiction, in which the health condition is shown to inspire rewardingly addiction-like experience.⁹³

Addiction-like Enjoyment and Nineteenth-Century Periodicals

Tennyson—an enthusiastic reader of De Quincey and a generally interested reader of scientific publications—also found a place for himself in periodicals, as Kathryn Ledbetter has described. “The Lotos-Eaters” was written and revised over a period in the 1830s in which Tennyson became increasingly involved in periodicals, such as the annuals the *Gem* and the *Englishman’s Magazine* (Ledbetter 16–17). Tennyson would become a frequent writer for publications like *Macmillan’s*, too, which was both a source of readerly pleasure and an outlet for scientific writers like Huxley, Lewes, and others. But as early as “The Lotos-Eaters,” Tennyson was exploring the investigatory potential of periodic consumption. De Quincey had already dramatized such an experience through prose in his *Confessions*, and Tennyson’s “Lotos-Eaters” enhances the sense of repetitions that drive toward possibility. The poem does so with intensified, sonorous repetitions patterned after physical hunger. Its eponymous sailors come to understand and participate in a mysterious place that can never be static, never completely known, as long as it remains rhythmically, musically in process.

Just as periodicals would serially report on habitual experience (quite obviously when publishing De Quincey’s work), Tennyson’s lotos-eaters speak repetitively about

habitual preferences and enjoyments were now, though perhaps in a skewed and limited way, shaping what was read, as writers responded to their market (or what they interpreted to be their market) in order to feed certain habits.

⁹³ See Linda Hughes and Michael Lund’s *The Victorian Serial* for greater detail on how the serial novel matched capitalist desires for sustained repetition and a sense of regimented time initiated by railways and accelerated trade.

their own repetitions. Distinctions between that which is known and the ways in which it is known become blurred in such a milieu. Armstrong notes that “The Lotos-Eaters” “is both the *expression* of the addictive desire in which drug requires further drugging, and an *analysis* of the conditions under which the unhappy consciousness and the unhappy body come into being” (87). Analysis matches expression when the thing being analyzed is itself the addictive desire that drives both analytical exploration and articulation. Both expression and analysis approach the possible without achieving static actuality in this case, which only enhances the poem’s orientation toward ambiguity.

That ambiguity characterizes the lotos-eaters’ bodily poetry of exploration and drugged defeat—poetry manifested in emphatically physical sounds about an emphatically physical subject, poetry rich with the rhythms of physiological experience, harmonizing with, providing knowable form to, and contributing to the eaters’ physical surroundings.⁹⁴ Repetitive rhythms of poetic music change the lotos-eaters’ place in quite physical terms, making it hard to establish that place as simply one thing:

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies. (46–52)

⁹⁴ As Jason Rudy writes, “Tennyson’s poetry takes steps toward embodied poetic form, a poetic practice in which bodily experience is not simply referenced but enacted” (46).

Alliteration and heavily stressed rhythms forge narcotic patterns in the above passage. An echo-location technique establishes a somniferous, in-process place, as positional coordinates are called out (“there,” “here,” sweet sleep being “brought down” by music, and so on) through words that intimate wearily drugged droning. Poetic place-making springs from the patterns and bodily tendencies of addiction here, and such a place can be studied if not ever defined simply. The weary lotos-eaters are stuck in this ambiguous realm, always addictively driven about their island, where they encounter different things and constantly know more and more about what they encounter. Meanwhile their readers at least have the opportunity to reflect soberly on the musical pleasures and learning attained by such repetitiously productive aesthetic enjoyment. For the reader, this is merely an addiction-like experience with all the rewards of lotos-eating and none of the drawbacks.

The Addiction-Like Solution in *Goblin Market*

Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* also tells of knowledge gained through desirous habits of consumption. It’s the story of a consumer lured into reiterated devouring, and it has also been read as a tale of addiction (see, for instance, Shelley O’Reilly’s essay on absinthe in the poem). Published in 1862, Rossetti’s fantastical narrative of temptation and recovery has been read in light of her religious views,⁹⁵ yet the poem arrives at results remarkably similar to those of the irreligious “Lotos-Eaters.” Rossetti’s poem, for one, is just as clearly based around a habit-forming substance; as Shelley O’Reilly has emphasized, the poem’s goblins are selling wormwood, an

⁹⁵ As Dinah Roe notes, “In her devotional prose and poetry, Rossetti invites her reader to engage with a sophisticated network of biblical allusion, in which Christian doctrine is re-thought and sometimes re-forged” (7).

ingredient in absinthe.⁹⁶ Their product is also enjoyed through repetitive consuming and expressing: one of the goblin's targets, Laura, drinking what the goblins are selling, "sucked and sucked and sucked the more" (134).⁹⁷ Expression matches the thing expressed in this narrative of addiction, much as it does in "The Lotos-Eaters"; Laura, like the lotos-eaters, consumes and consumes and consumes, and the language reflects those repetitions.

Goblin Market begins with reiterative enticement that initiates the protagonist's exploration of her world through such repetitive consumption. "Come buy, come buy" (4) the goblins shout, urging a consumer's thirst in the most jingly, redundantly reused terms. But as in "The Lotos-Eaters," that sustained sameness leads to contemplation of material differences. The consumer's eye is led to varied produce: "Plump unpecked cherries / Melons and raspberries, / Bloom-down-cheeked peaches" (7–9) that are "ripe together / In summer weather (15–16). The goblins urge again and again that the consumer seek more; speaking in patterns, they shape the terms for a habitual, endless chase after novelty.

This sales strategy thus carries imaginative weight. As the goblin's list goes on, they cite a range of tantalizing items, which bring different attending associations, and they eventually name "[c]itrons from the South" (29). Their products suggest a realm, a region, a world. The summer weather through which the fruit achieved ripeness therefore

⁹⁶ See Shelley O'Reilly, "Absinthe Makes the Tart Grow Fonder: A Note on 'wormwood' in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'."

⁹⁷ Megan Norcia writes of how "Goblin Market" provides lessons about how to live in a bustling metropolis; Terrence Holt emphasizes the economic terms used throughout the poem. Rebecca Stern observes a particular commercial context surrounding the consumption problems of "Goblin Market": "the widespread [Victorian] problem of food adulteration provides apt framework for this tale of a young woman sickened by the food she consumes" (Stern 482).

works as part of their sales pitch, part of the product. Laura, charmed by the goblins, similarly ponders the locales that might produce such fruit. “How fair the vine must grow / Whose grapes are so luscious; / How warm the wind must blow / Thro’ those fruit bushes” (60–63). This is all conjecture, however, and phrased as such: “how? how?” The act of questioning (rather than knowing) follows the possibility proffered by the goblins and leads Laura to imagine such places (those of the frugiferous vines and warm winds). She truly doesn’t know how fair the vine grows, or how warm the wind blows through those fruit bushes, yet she is not asking about such matters in the expectation of an answer. She is asking rhetorically, speaking anaphorically, in the rhythms laid out in the beginning of the poem by the goblins, answering their calls in a strange sort of affirmative—with intensifying interrogation that repeats itself, suggesting worlds that are remote, merely possible. While the goblins perniciously sell a corrupted product, in other words, the consumerist, addiction-like thinking they promote also supports expansive imaginative poetry, wherein material patterns suggest without completely offering total knowledge and thus open up imaginative space for the creative contemplator. Here again is doubleness; here are opposed meanings springing from habitual consumption. Addictive consumerism is both dangerous in Rossetti’s poem and leads to contemplation. It does so, as in “The Lotos-Eaters,” by inspiring thoughts about the possible from within a perilous actual.

In Rossetti’s poem, addictive thinking is more emphatically consumerist and commercial than in Tennyson’s,⁹⁸ and those same commercial patterns become in *Goblin*

⁹⁸ For a discussion of Rossetti’s use of marketing language, see Herbert Tucker’s “Rossetti’s Goblin Marketing: Sweet to Tongue and Sound to Eye.” Tucker writes:

The eldritch embroidery of “Goblin Market” has probably attracted more, and more various, commentary during the last two decades than any other poem of its time. It proves on recent

Market the most condensed forms for poetic patterning. “Come buy, come buy” is repeated throughout, propelling the poem’s rhythms, and respondent desirous repetitions create a world around materials of exchange. The goblins are not even human merchants, but rather themselves repetitions or reflections of merchants. They are imitations, matters of art and skewed mimesis in grossly physical terms. “One had a cat’s face, / One whisked a tail, / One tramped at a rat’s pace, / One crawled like a snail” (71–74). More telling is the passage in which we learn that “One parrot-voiced and jolly / Cried ‘Pretty Goblin’ still for ‘Pretty Polly’” (112–113). Parrots are already mimics, lacking human consciousness of the words they repeat; this goblin is then a parrot of a parrot, a mimic who utters language of repetition further removed from a source of that repetition. The goblins are so mindlessly repetitive in their sales-chants that one of them can cry “pretty goblin,” which is plainly a terrible sales strategy unless one intends to sell a goblin. Their commercial chatter has intensified into nattering self-involvement, a mere celebration of repetitive goblin-ness.

The goblins can also be capable manipulators, however. Their art consists of language’s patterns, the mimicry and echoing of sounds, all flooding around the sensory enjoyments of the fruit they sell, and Laura is sold on the idea of consumerist repetition itself, on wanting to consume more and more and more. Grounds for exchange are then found in unexpected places: “Good folk, I have no coin,” Laura says, “To take were to purloin” (116–117). The goblins are unbothered by this. ““You have much gold upon

examination to be a poem about communal sorority and also about patriarchal dominion; about the Christian Eucharist and also free self-actualization; about diffusive jouissance and also the therapeutic consolidation of a split soul; about anorexia nervosa, vampirism, the adulteration of foodstuffs, absinthe addiction, and the pros and cons of masturbation” (117).

My overarching idea in this present chapter is that these concerns about isolation and community, selfhood and transcendence, jouissance, vampirism and diet, revolved around a concern with addiction.

your head,' / They answered all together" (123–124). Laura clips off "a precious golden lock" and sheds "a tear more rare than pearl, / Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red":

Sweeter than honey from the rock
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flowed that juice;
She never tasted such before,
How should it cloy with length of use?
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore . . . (126–135)

This overwhelming consumption is specifically compared to desirous enjoyment of wine. Laura is on her way to addiction almost immediately, and she describes her yearnings as an addiction. "I ate and ate my fill," she tells her sister after consuming so much fruit—"Yet my mouth waters still" (165–166). Even the experience of the fruit initially motivates thoughts about a world beyond the fruit, leading her to think of honey, wine, and water, none of which can compare to this substance that could never "cloy with length of use." She wants more and more; she is thinking as the goblins' chants would have her think.

Her sister Lizzie urges Laura to forget that thirst, however, and they fall asleep, then go about a day of routine:

Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,

Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should . . . (202–209)

These are patterns of easy contentment, particularly in the mind of Lizzie, who speaks “with an open heart” while Laura sits “in an absent dream” (210–211). Both delight in materiality’s patterns; Lizzie just enjoys them in a sober way, as routine enriched by a fuller awareness. They are, at this stage, quite different: “One content, one sick in part; / One warbling for the mere bright day’s delight, / One longing for the night” (212–214). Laura’s mind, awakened to pleasures that Lizzie knows not, wants in a way that disrupts contentment, and the remainder of the poem will track Laura’s pursuit of a way out of this tormenting addiction.

Influenced by the goblins, Laura’s mind continues to tilt toward “that unknown orchard,” that imagined place, that realm of possibility suggested by all these patterns that lead to no satiety.⁹⁹ Yet the market seems to have vanished. “She dreamed of melons, as a traveler sees / False waves in desert drouth / With shade of leaf-crowned trees, / And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze” (289–292). The punchier, “iterated jingle” (233) of the goblins becomes the longer poetic lines of unfulfilled want here, leading her to the contemplation of vanished enjoyment, comparable to a traveler passing through a place of fantasy.¹⁰⁰ Once again remote worlds are conjured in the language of desire; once

⁹⁹ Steven Connor writes, “The poem institutes an energetic but self-validating sign-system, the incremental accumulation of terms acquiring internally a kind of parodied sacramental value. But repeatedly, as we have seen, images designed to quell difference end up reactivating it” (447).

¹⁰⁰ The irregularity of Rossetti’s lines, more typically short, was one of the technically unorthodox features that struck readers; in a biography of Christina Rossetti, Kathleen Jones observes that her “technical innovations such as the short, irregularly rhymed lines and simplicity of expression were seen as a refreshing departure” from Tennyson, the dominant poet-celebrity of the era (112).

again literary creation matches addictive impulses. The poem, in this way, shows how material habits can inform the creation of possible worlds—by always compelling one toward something left out of previous iterations, and by representing form itself, the reiterations of a pattern. That patterned language simplifies the surface of Rossetti's poetry, thereby having the effect of suggesting more than is stated, contributing to a suggestive milieu much like that of the lotos-eaters. As Antony Harrison has observed, Christina Rossetti's "consciseness" lends itself "to dramatic intensity, to deliberate ambiguity, and, even more notably, to [her] often open-ended symbolic modes of expression" (*Christina Rossetti in Context* 10).

That open-endedness has long conflicted with Rossetti's reputation as a religious writer. To many critics, there's a curious division here between stern theological dogma and poetically indulgent free-for-all. There have been several attempts to isolate one lucid way to understand the work. Some, such as Germaine Greer, have seen *Goblin Market* as a coping mechanism; Rossetti, she writes, "used the aspirations of piety as a metaphor for her own frustrated sexuality" (Greer 360).¹⁰¹ Others have emphasized different forces at work in the bodily suggestive language of the poem. Antony Harrison describes a more general concern with illness held by Rossetti, who suffered from a range of maladies. He writes, "Rossetti's unrelenting attacks upon the indulgence of sexual desire, often troped as an illness or represented as an addiction that produces malaise, disease, or death for narrators and characters in her poetry, are directly related to the experience of illness—and her understanding of the experience of illness—in her own life" ("Christina Rossetti: Illness and Ideology" 416–417).

¹⁰¹ Diane d'Amico's *Christina Rossetti: Faith, Gender, and Time* covers much of the recent history of Rossetti scholarship, including Greer's (8).

Recently, there has also been a resurgence in scholarship that takes Rossetti's piety seriously. Diane d'Amico, referring to criticism such as Greer's, writes that "a poem so clearly about body and soul is often read as focusing only on the body" (69). d'Amico notes, about *Goblin Market*, "if we read these lines with Rossetti's Christian faith in mind, they point not to the pleasure to be experienced in satisfying any of the sensual appetites, but rather to the impossibility of ever finding full satisfaction by attempting to satisfy the body" (69). Rossetti, in this sense, would be assuming some of the aesthetic orientation depicted by Tennyson, only now with a religious understanding of addiction: the sheer impossibility of addiction's satisfaction suggests something divinely grander, something divinely unattainable and sublime (a numinously inaccessible thing).

As a Tractarian, Rossetti engaged a religious movement in Britain that sought a return to material rituals. John Henry Newman was a representative figure for Tractarianism, also called the Oxford Movement due to affiliations with the university's community (the "Tractarian" name came from the movement's central publication, *Tracts for the Times*). Mary Arseneau's recent study of Christina Rossetti addresses her Tractarian beliefs in "intense incarnationalism" as well as "their sacramentalism, a term that refers to both their reverence for the sacraments of the Church and to the broader concept of their awareness of the transcendent as sacramentally and analogically present in the material world" (12). Goblin consumption, in its suggestion of materiality that only leads to thirsting for more materiality, misses the point of Rossetti's incarnationalism, but it intimates that point nonetheless. It is a wicked reversal of the incarnationalist path toward recognized divine bounty in material experience; goblin consumption drives

toward mere pursuit of material enjoyment. That incessant pursuit for enjoyment is made possible by and alludes to some greater bounty within materiality.¹⁰² Suzanne Waldman writes that the goblins represent “a primary source of superegoic pressure within utilitarian society, which is its ‘violen[t] and obscen[e]’ way of inciting one to indulge in a ‘boundless and aggressive enjoyment’” (Waldman, *The Demon and the Damsel* 63).¹⁰³ A key word here is “boundless”—the word and its synonyms are full of import for the religious writer. For a Tractarian, the boundlessness suggested by ritual material consumption might point toward a different kind of enormity, that of a deity. Writes Arseneau, “Underlying the Tractarian emphasis on the sacraments and the renewed interest in ritual, ceremonial, and ecclesiastical decoration is an assumption of the interconnection between the physical and spiritual realms” (100). The goblins’ manner of consumption suggests something more that eludes every act of consuming—it is addictive and thus will not produce a content sense of that “more” as divinity, but it emphatically *does* suggest that there is something more.

The forces behind the culture of repetitive, goblin-like consumption—forces that included expanded commerce, leisure fed by accumulated surplus, and urbanization that collected consumers ever more closely—would accelerate and intensify rapidly in

¹⁰² Drug addiction had already been offered as a new sort of cultural ritual, a foundational component for a culture of habitual pleasures, as in De Quincey’s “church of opium” (*Confessions* 47). The relationship between church and drug was noticed famously by Marx, who called religion “the opium of the people” (131). Sometimes the language of addiction’s religious implications could be a little less direct, but still discernible. Later in the century, for instance, when drugs were becoming increasingly criminalized and regulated in the United States, one “Dr. William Muir of Brooklyn, speaking for the New York Pharmaceutical Association, showed the plight of the honest retailer . . . ‘A good many people are killed by automobiles; but there is [also] a good deal of pleasure gotten out of them,’ he said” (Musto 46–47). The doctor is describing martyrs to the cause of enjoyment, essentially arguing for human sacrifice to maintain “a good deal of pleasure.” This secular religion of Dr. Muir had its rituals, its repetitions, carried out by commercial customs, through transportation routes and in devoted acts of eating.

¹⁰³ Waldman is using phrases from page 92 of Joan Copjec’s *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

Rossetti's time.¹⁰⁴ Thomas De Quincey had articulated that ascendant culture and the corresponding all-important role of drug addiction in his *Confessions*, where he wanders around the city and hallucinates about the source of opium while taking the drug, all in order to clarify "the doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium" (*Confessions* 47). This secular church's congregation grew in the decades following the publication of his *Confessions*. For the Tractarian believer in physical ritual as a path to greater spiritual awareness, material ritual that suggests some greater power could be neatly articulated with regard to its reversal, the then popularly understood sense of the addict's version of material ritual that suggests more.

Goblin Market, along these lines, echoes religious scripture and practice in its story of addiction-recovery. d'Amico points out various moments of Biblical language:

Laura believes that the goblin fruit is "Sweeter than honey from the rock." Such a comparison echoes Ps. 81:16: "And with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." In the language of Christian symbolism, the rock is read as a reference to Christ . . . Not surprisingly, after Laura's feast, we are told that 'her tree of life drooped from the root.' In Revelation, the tree of life is promised 'to him that overcometh' (Rev. 2:7), in other words, to those who follow Christ and his commandments. Laura's physical decline is to be read as emblematic of a spiritual one . . ."

(d'Amico 71)

¹⁰⁴ For an account of the rise of leisure in the Victorian era, see Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885*; urbanization was, also, one of the most startlingly observable changes during the nineteenth century: "Between 1801 and 1891 the urban population increased sevenfold, the rural only by a quarter" (Hoppen 56).

Laura is led to that decline through material consumption that leads to sickness rather than religious epiphany.¹⁰⁵ Yet while Laura's addiction is a danger, it at least intimates a sense of great potential in materiality. If only her addiction didn't make her so solitarily sick. What is needed, then, is something merely addiction-like. And the poem at last produces that addiction-like thinking through the help of the Lizzie character, as discussed below. The result is another version of Armstrong's double poem, confirming cultural consensus (addiction is an evil) while finding possibility in that consensus for something different (the addiction-*like* can be beneficial, offering broader awareness). Salutory imaginative possibility is found in the patterns of *Goblin Market*'s physical experiences despite the dangers of those experiences.

That payoff of addiction-like patterns recalls De Quincey, again. Jan Marsh, in a biography of Christina Rossetti, has contended that De Quincey seems a most noticeable influence on Rossetti's work in another passage of hers dealing with truly ravenous appetite—the crocodile cannibalism of her poem, “My Dream” (Marsh 167). There, Rossetti describes a dream of standing beside the Euphrates, where she sees “crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew” (7); “one there was who waxed beyond the rest, / Wore kinglier girdle and a kingly crown, / Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast” (15–17). This king begins to eat other crocodiles.

An execrable appetite arose,

He battened on them, crunched, and sucked them in.

He knew no law, he feared no binding law,

¹⁰⁵ D.M.R. Bentley has related the goblins to “the Christian's three traditional and mortal enemies—the flesh, the world, and the devil . . . Considered more closely, however, Rossetti's initial depiction of the cupidinous goblins and their ‘free-born’ fruit” could suggest a relationship with Christian theological attitudes toward free will (66–67).

But ground them with inexorable jaw:
The luscious fat distilled upon his chin,
Exuded from his nostrils and his eyes,
While still like hungry death he fed his maw (25–31)

De Quincey, notes Marsh in her biography of Rossetti, wrote of crocodiles as well in his *Confessions*, crocodiles who “were hideous beasts swarming through de Quincey’s drugged ‘oriental dreams’, self-created creatures of loathing by which he was pursued . . . It was surely from such sources that Christina, whether she knew it or not, derived her cannibal crocodile” (167). Her crocodile is not merely a monstrous presence in an “oriental dream,” however—and such characteristics are not the only attributes that recall de Quincey. The monster is defined by hunger, ravenously destructive and unethical even as he represents a certain height of aesthetic glory: “crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast. / All gleamed compact and green with scale on scale, / But special burnishment adorned his mail” (17–19). The language of the crocodile’s DeQuinceyan consumption proves similar to the language of excess and consumption in *Goblin Market*, too. The crocodile does not simply devour his food; it covers him, “luscious fat” oozing down his chin, much as the juice of the goblins covers Lizzie, when she finally visits the goblins and fruit “syrupped all her face, / And lodged in dimples of her chin” (434–435).

In either case, there is an exaggeratedly sensory substance sought by intense appetites. Rossetti, clearly enough in the crocodile passage, does not lose sight of the dangers brought about by living with this kind of consumption. In the first stage of Laura’s own addiction to the materials gotten from the goblins, she becomes lost to her sister; she dreams of possibilities; she loses herself in abstraction. While Lizzie, after she

“plucked purple and rich golden flags” (220), hurries home, “Laura loitered still among the rushes” (226). She is less industrious:

She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,
Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat. (293–298)

Habits of hard work and wholesome consumption have vanished.

But addiction does not need to be a dominant threat, either, in the world of *Goblin Market*. Lizzie proves this. She visits the goblins’ market with hopes of reviving her ailing sister, and she deals directly with addictive substances: “for the first time in her life,” we are told, she started “to listen and look” (327–328). Lizzie is only now an attentive empiricist, thinking *like* her consumerist sister while maintaining some critical distance. Greater knowledge and a cure for addiction soon come from Lizzie’s distanced encounter with addiction-feeding commerce. It starts when the goblins spot her, and she asks to make a purchase—now with silver (324) rather than tears or hair. She is not going to deal as directly or physically with addiction, not as her sister had done. This upsets the goblins, who try to force-feed her, but Lizzie resists, and “laughed in heart to feel the drip / Of juice that syrugged all her face” (433–434).

Though Lizzie perceives the sensory strangeness promoted by the goblins, she has not consumed the fruit. The goblins, defeated, flee into material solidity:

Some writhed into the ground,

Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanished in the distance. (442–446)

They are in full retreat, back to the slime from whence they came and which they represent as purveyors of oozing substance.

Lizzie returns to Laura, then proceeds to assist with her sister's detoxification by replacing the previous addiction with consumption that binds the two together:

Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me . . . (468–472)

This is productive consumption—it “makes much of” Lizzie and causes a return of affectionate consciousness. D.M.R. Bentley notes, “Lizzie simply assists in restoring and enlightening faculties (reason, will) and qualities (love, duty) that Laura possessed in some measure originally and lost in some measure at her fall” (76–77). She does so, again, by introducing controlled and more sympathetically applied uses of the addictive juice that had intoxicated Laura. This is addiction-like thinking, whereby the patterns of intensified appetite are used to ends different from—more enlightening than—incessant self-feeding.

Laura, cured, finds herself disgusted by her previous addiction: “She loathed the feast” (495). A new sort of physiological experience takes over Laura, one that directs her

more intensely toward the indescribable, as a series of similes fails to do adequate justice to her new experience of disgust. Note the namelessness characterizing the condition of the more powerful force surpassing addiction:

Swift fire spread thro' her veins, knocked at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah! Fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense failed in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topped waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea . . . (507–520)

The unnameable, the “bitterness without a name,” the distant and vague place to which Laura’s addictive habits have recurrently directed her mind, overtakes her now as she tastes the juices at a level mediated by her sister. Thinking now merely in an addiction-like way, she has a clearer view of her experiences—superior knowledge.

And the goblins have been defeated. They could not control the material in which they traffic and have sunk back into that material. By repetitively selling their fruit, they

unwittingly engaged the patterns of material experience that could also aid a creative cure: the addiction-like, repetitive appreciation of the unnameable, the ungraspable, beyond material patterns of consumption, which in turn compels endless attempts to name, to form, to create verbal connections and similes and poetry.¹⁰⁶

Rossetti, like Tennyson, produced poetic patterns that reflected those of addictive pursuit, and both poets used those patterns to characterize intense aesthetic exploration of possibility in materiality. Their addiction-like poetry presents addiction as a disease whose patterns nonetheless structure useful epistemological and aesthetic approaches. Tennyson—studied in science, a reader of De Quincey, and savvy about periodical culture—emphasizes in “The Lotos-Eaters” the knowledge and aesthetic experience found simultaneously through intensified, habitual reiteration (most accessible to the non-drugged, readerly experience of that reiteration); Rossetti, reviewing consumerist desire from a critical, religiously inflected perspective, ultimately supplants in her poem the consumer’s exaggeratedly patterned hunger with a content, soberly distanced awareness of possibility in materiality that is phrased in similar patterns. In either case, addiction-like poetry—language repetitively manifesting pursuit of possibility—provides a chance for such sober expansion of thinking.

¹⁰⁶ Suzanne Waldman notes a mixed role of repetitions in the poem, both establishing an oppressive order while offering access to the indescribable enormity toward which incessant repetitions drive; she describes “the quality of ‘repetition and insistence’ that can be found in so much of Rossetti’s poetry” (“‘O Wanton Eyes Run Over’: Repetition and Fantasy in Christina Rossetti” 535). There is, Waldman observes, an empowering, sublime sort of death drive in the patterning of such symbolic order. She notes a “motive to liberate desire,” which is “visible in Rossetti’s poetry of religious transcendence through death” (“‘O Wanton Eyes Run Over’: Repetition and Fantasy in Christina Rossetti” 536–537). This may not allude to a religious orientation, but, as Simon Humphries puts it, the poem’s “religious ground is itself much less sure than generally supposed” (391).

CHAPTER 5

ADDICTION-LIKE STRUCTURE IN TWO KINDS OF VICTORIAN NOVEL:

THE CASE OF *BLEAK HOUSE* AND *MIDDLEMARCH*

In *The Moonstone*, shortly before the mystery of the eponymous gem is resolved, an opium-addicted doctor's assistant named Ezra Jennings cites Thomas De Quincey while planning an experiment with opium, an experiment that might reveal whether the drug could have influenced the gem's theft (400). And Wilkie Collins' novel is far from the only fictional example of such narcotic, DeQuinceyan investigation. There is the cocaine- and morphine-taking Sherlock Holmes, for example. Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Man with the Twisted Lip" opens with the description of Isa Whitney, an opium addict, who became addicted due to "some foolish freak when he was at college; for, having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects" (351). Even outside crime fiction, troubled intellectual and aesthetic pursuit relate to the original English Opium-Eater: consider Will Ladislaw's explicitly De Quincey-like, youthful experiments with opium in *Middlemarch* (53).

In each of those three cases, we see a relationship between learning—whether through investigation, college experimentation, or self-education—and participating in the habitual intoxication represented by De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Addictive consumption's patterns in these post-De Quincey instances also suggest acquisition of knowledge and pleasure—the patterns of intensified, repetitive experimentation and the patterns of intensified, intoxicating thrill.¹⁰⁷ The addictive risks

¹⁰⁷ Novels involving scientists often deal with addiction in Romantic terms, if not explicitly in terms related to De Quincey. Thomas Schmid notes the connection between isolated scientific pursuit and the isolation of

of narcotics were by this time increasingly understood and opiates were moving toward increased regulation—addiction was more and more a widely accepted medical problem—yet the intensity of addiction’s fusion of repetitive experiment with aesthetic enjoyment continued to suggest similarly intense, addiction-like storytelling. Specifically, this was storytelling about intensified pursuit of possibility, popularly but not only exemplified by the mystery genre, so often structured around addicted and addict-like characters. The addiction-like strategy modeled by De Quincey thus supported, once imported into novels, narratives of endless investigation similar to those seen in the *Confessions*. In the Victorian novel, with all its dialogic scope, that strategy could be deployed more broadly—in novels written around multiple addicted or addict-like characters, enhanced repetition underlies profuse variety, and this characteristic extended beyond the mystery genre.

This chapter looks at two novelistic developments resulting from the introduction of addiction-like narrative strategies into prose fiction: the mystery genre and the Darwinian realist novel. I argue that characters with drug or alcohol habits in two foundational examples of those genres pursue addiction-like investigations that contribute to the shaping of narrative worlds of repetitively registered possibility and strangeness. What I mean by “mystery genre” should be clear enough: Sherlock Holmes stories, *The Moonstone*, Raymond Chandler’s work, Dickens’s *Bleak House*. These are all stories populated by addicts—or, at the very least, by characters strongly, habitually inclined to intoxication—who repeatedly pursue knowledge according to the patterns of their thirsts. The connection between the mystery genre and addiction-like strategies, then, is the easy

addiction in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Earlier than Shelley, Benjamin Rush compared the consumption of Prometheus’ liver to alcoholism’s assault on the liver (Rush 8), and the destruction through excessive desire in either case resonates with the lonely desolation of Shelley’s “modern Prometheus.”

part of this chapter. The “Darwinian realist novel” designates a more specific, different tradition: the tradition of realism as represented and initiated by George Eliot. Eliot’s incorporation of Darwinian and otherwise scientifically inflected thinking into her novels is well known; typically her debt to Darwin and contemporary science is understood to involve her novels’ sense of interconnecting variety (George Levine; Beer) and an authoritative voice about such a richly various world (Rothfield). Eliot’s *Middlemarch* especially features authoritative views of its characters’ differing, emotionally loaded habits, habits that bring characters into new, always evolving, emotionally considered possibilities. I identify *Middlemarch*’s overall Darwinian narrative strategy as addiction-like, as well, in part for the following reason: the novel shows its characters doing the same work required by its reader—those characters repeatedly, feelingly strive to make sense of a world rich with Darwinian variety and possibility—and the character who does this work most successfully is Will Ladislaw, a recovered addict whose formative intellectual experience with repetitive possibility-pursuit originated with experiments with opium modeled after De Quincey’s.

Eliot uses tropes of addiction and addiction-like possibility-pursuit to create a new kind of realist novel, one in which truth is both felt and authoritatively known as expansively evolving possibility, a possibility that repeatedly, continually comes into actualized shape and is thus best appreciated by a character thinking in addict-like terms of repetitive pursuit of more and more possibility. Thus *Middlemarch* and *Bleak House* use addiction-like strategies to different ends, even if addict-like knowers in both *Bleak House* and *Middlemarch* shape their narrative worlds in similar ways. *Bleak House*’s city is a perilous labyrinth in which repeated desires urge ongoing repeated behaviors;

Middlemarch's narrative world is similarly shaped by addiction-like habits, habits used for more reflective understanding of the Darwinian ways in which the repetitive links with the strange, the discontinuous, the surprising.

Addiction-like characters know their worlds so well in these novels in part because their lived experience is closer to the very processes running through the construction of their worlds. Such addiction-like characters participate in the shaping of addiction-like textual realms through their endless efforts to know those realms. Michel de Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life* about the "mutation" of consumer into producer that "makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient" (Certeau xxi). Fictional consumers producing feverish patterns of possibility-pursuit—characters I have described as DeQuinceyan—likewise productively inhabit their narrative worlds by engaging intensely in its ongoing patterning, and this chapter looks at the way in which the patterns of their consumerist pursuit of possibility produces, specifically, fictional realms characterized (in either the serial mystery or the Darwinian realist novel) by repetitive variety. J. Hillis Miller in *Fiction and Repetition* describes that pervasive, unbalanced repetition in the Victorian novel specifically in terms of two versions of repetition—the first "grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition" (Miller 6). This is the smooth, perfect, stable repetition of successful mimesis. The second "Nietzschean mode of repetition posits a world based on difference. Each thing, this other theory would assume, is unique, intrinsically different from every other thing. Similarity arises against the background of this 'disparité du fond'" (Miller 6). In Victorian novels discussed here, those two forms of repetition that never completely

separate or perfectly join become an especially relevant problem, once these novels' addicted characters emphasize unstable, addiction-like repetition and begin to chart labyrinthine worlds.¹⁰⁸ These serial-novel worlds, repetitive and labyrinthine, have addiction-like qualities that sustain repetitive movement toward more and more—and characters who are addict-like intensify and most intensely experience those qualities.

To repeat, before I look more closely at *Bleak House* and *Middlemarch*: this chapter outlines how addiction-like narrative strategies shaped the serial mystery novel and the Darwinian realist novel. In the case of *Bleak House*, structuring a narrative around addict-like investigators results in a troubled realm of endless pursuit, while *Middlemarch* suggests some healthier, Darwinian knowledge of variety can emerge from reflective, considerate possibility-pursuit. In both novels, addict-like characters pursue possibility, learn about that possibility, and behave in ways that help intensify their inhabited novelistic mazes, places so windingly labyrinthine because they are based on the patterns represented and studied by endlessly desiring inhabitants. Both novels suggest broader understanding of possibility emerges from both affectively and intellectually engaging with worldly mystery, and both suggest that there is a world-changing and world-understanding potency to the addiction-like patterns that structure their own narratives.

Dickens and Labyrinthine Networks

¹⁰⁸ J. Hillis Miller explains how linguistic and narrative repetitions inevitably build a labyrinth in his *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines*. He describes "the blind alleys in thought to which repetition leads" because, "[n]o repetition is exact, but the meaning of a sign depends on taking it as the exact repetition of some other sign" (8). This same linguistic logic, leading down those interminable alleys of a labyrinth, shapes the experience of characters whose thought is intensely concerned with repetition.

Dickens maintained a typically Victorian attitude toward alcoholic intemperance—that is to say, he was inconsistent on the subject. On the one hand, he regularly drank alcohol to assist his own literary efforts. Fred Kaplan writes, “On reading days, at seven in the morning he had fresh cream and two tablespoons of rum . . . at three a pint of champagne. Five minutes before his performance he had an egg beaten into a glass of sherry” (525–526). At times, drunkenness held charming, convivial promise within his texts, too. In “Making a Night of It,” for example, an early periodical sketch by Boz, he describes a night out for two disastrously bibulous friends—a mess of a time, but also basically a matter of fraternal carousing.

Still, this was the nineteenth century, the age of incipient temperance movements addiction’s institution as a medically accepted health problem. Elsewhere in Dickens’s writing, alcohol habit clearly meant disease and misery. “The Drunkard’s Death,” as the title suggests, is a rather more one-sided piece. There Dickens inveighs against “drunkenness — that fierce rage for the slow, sure poison, that oversteps every other consideration; that casts aside wife, children, friends, happiness, and station” (*Sketches by Boz* 463). In this case, drunkenness clearly contains an element of addictive desire and destroys social relations, even as, in “Making a Night of It,” it can also bolster them.

Opposite senses of intense consumption also provide narrative tension for Dickens’s novels.¹⁰⁹ Looking at *Bleak House* specifically, we see how addiction, addiction-like behavior, or otherwise intensified consumption tend to have two effects, often at odds with one another: the first effect is ruination and the second is a more useful

¹⁰⁹Though Deidre Lynch compares the enjoyment of Dickensian character to that of a cigarette, noting a promotional project in which cigarettes were sold with portraits of Dickens characters. She describes the “collaboration between the collectible character and the cigarette—a luxury import that, through its addictiveness, at last becomes a daily necessity” (19).

patterning of characters' repetitive thought processes. Correspondingly, *Bleak House* is characterized by a swamped city of interlocking perplexities derived from various desires and pursuits of more and more and more—these factors are seen, for instance, in the novel's central and impenetrable Chancery suit, Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce, the outcome of which is awaited especially by three wards with no promise of a clear resolution¹¹⁰—but the novel's intense desirers and intense consumers do also develop refined senses of this murky realm's possibility through their addiction-like pursuits.¹¹¹ Such intense consumers include investigators as well as a manipulative, claret-drinking “friend” to the wards' caretaker. They ceaselessly and self-interestedly seek to understand and drink from the possibilities of their world, and their ongoing actions reinforce the nature of their realm as one of endless pursuit, craving, investigation, and mystery. Richard Carstone, the ward of Jarndyce seduced to his destruction by the money-owing, often-drinking manipulator Skimpole, calls the version of reality he has been led into a “labyrinth” (646).

Dickens's novel, to be clear then, is not a celebratory look at the epistemological power of addiction-like investigation, which in *Bleak House* does not typically lead to

¹¹⁰ My reading of *Bleak House* elaborates upon recent work that thinks of the novel in terms of its social network and as a text detailing investigation—specifically recent studies by John McBratney, Caroline Levine and Brooke Taylor. McBratney argues that *Bleak House*'s investigators discover social interconnection (59), Levine that network theory can shed light on this interconnection (517), and Taylor that the knowledge gained in this world is very much imaginative (172). Reading *Bleak House* in terms of addiction synthesizes such readings by positing its socially embedded consumption habits as imaginative ways of knowing the world.

¹¹¹ I use the phrase “intense consumers” here to characterize those who regularly consume addictive substances but who may not be strictly termed “addicts.” Gail Turley Houston notes that Esther “navigates between the Scylla and Charybdis of the consuming and consumed self in a novel that represents both appetitive self-centeredness and negation of appetite” (124). Addiction's joys and the need to discipline addiction (due to its dangers) surround much of the drama of this novel. That in-between navigation of a world rich with out-of-control pursuit of pleasure has been noticed by others writing about Dickens; Dirk den Hartog has argued in *Dickens and Romantic Psychology* that Dickens and other Victorian novelists “involve themselves in the conflict of Romantically legitimated freedom and traditionally authorized restraint” (7).

absolute clarity of understanding. Obscurity is everywhere here. Fog famously blankets the investigations of *Bleak House*, investigations that insist on the messy, the recondite, the baroquely confusing.¹¹² Commercial and social forces of addiction-like, intensified consumerist desire contribute to the Dickensian city littered with too much stuff.¹¹³ Esther, for instance, understands London as an overfilled maze of commerce when she travels through it with the detective Bucket. They journey

through such a labyrinth of streets, that I soon lost all idea where we were; except that we had crossed and recrossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying waterside, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares, chequered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses, swing-bridges, and masts of ships. At length we stopped at the corner of a little slimy turning, which the wind from the river, rushing up to it, did not purify . . . (717)

The tools of the global trade in, especially, drugs such as tea, coffee, rum, opium, and tobacco—tools including ships, docks, and warehouses—have accumulated in this slimy labyrinth, with its warehouses especially over-brimming. Some characters, like *Bleak House*'s Nemo, become lost and submerged in this cluttered realm of excessive stuff, succumbing to the ruinous effect of addiction and becoming “no one.” Others, like the habitually wine-drinking, investigative lawyer Tulkinghorn, try to stay afloat by thinking strategically and intensely about their realm's possibilities. Then there is the claret-

¹¹² “Chancery—fog—madness: this is another theme,” observes Nabokov in his lecture on the novel (68).

¹¹³ John Ruskin found his contemporary Victorian city to be a rather imprisoning, mechanical labyrinth. Addressing workers in the twenty-eight letter of his *Fors Clavigera*, he describes the pound or labyrinth which the Greeks supposed to have been built by Daedalus, to enclose the bestial nature, engrafted on humanity. The Man with the Bull's head. The Greek Daedalus is the power of mechanical as opposed to imaginative art; and this is the kind of architecture which Greeks and Florentines alike represent him as providing for human beasts. Could anything more precisely represent the general look of your architecture now? (394).

drinking Skimpole, who manipulates those around him by declaring a drunkard's sense of incomprehensible possibility, or "perplexities" (which he says are an "opportunity" for those around him to help him) (66–67). Skimpole makes tactically savvy use of a trope of bewilderment in this realm where bewilderment is all—this place of fog and murk and infinite clutter, where desirous seekers endlessly meet with dumbfounding possibility.

The Strangeness Discovered by Habitual Investigation

Skimpole, shortly after telling Mr. Jarndyce that "you know the world (which in your sense is the universe), and I know nothing of it" (68), begins to ply Richard and Esther with friendliness, so that they might help him out of debt.¹¹⁴ He flatters them by saying Esther's "quiet habit of method and usefulness" is much needed (69). Here is Skimpole's strategy for ruining others to his benefit: he first declares that the world is unfathomable, then he turns conversation toward habit that might make the whole mess useable, sensible, enjoyable, and inhabitable, which proves quite persuasive to those around him (and leads them into his labyrinth of loss and parasitism). Esther remarks, "We were all enchanted" (67).¹¹⁵ Those enchanted by Skimpole fall in line and reproduce the habits he suggests, habits that his own customary thirsts require. Habits, Skimpole seems to recognize, can sustain movement toward possibility. By speaking of his confusion and calling for habits in order get a bigger cut of that confusion, Skimpole

¹¹⁴ In Alexander Welsh's words, Skimpole has "a profound awareness of the interdependency of human society" (*Dickens Redressed* 96); Skimpole shows us how the knowing addict, always approaching something other, something outside and never fully internalized in a satiating way, can manipulate this interdependency quite successfully.

¹¹⁵ Alexander Welsh has observed Skimpole to be a kind of binding sympathetic force, "very much a part of Esther's first acquaintance with her guardian" Jarndyce (*Dickens Redressed* 92).

cleverly deploys addiction-like tactics that reflect his addictive consumption but are used more savvily than literal addiction. He is a masterful addict-like thinker.

The character of Skimpole was based on the Romantic poet and editor Leigh Hunt, whom Dickens had (first lovingly, then warily) observed to be a sentimentally inclined, clever, manipulative addict. Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, “The original attraction was a sentimental one: Dickens was moved by a comment Hunt made about the inscription Dickens had placed on the grave of his beloved sister-in-law Mary Hogarth” (63). Dickens would, however, come to “tease Hunt” about his drunkenness and later would observe in the old friend of Shelley’s a tendency to indebtedness resolved by appeals to friendship (Bodenheimer 63). Dickens’s fictional, habitually drinking Skimpole, accordingly, also brings together drunken or addiction-like tendencies with a sly pursuit of more and more comforts, enjoyments, and financial betterment. He rhetorically deploys an addiction-like, intense orientation to mysterious possibility (he claims to know nothing; he claims he is perplexed) while persuading others to perform habitually in ways that can further help him along toward possibility and gain.

The novel’s investigators establish a related approach to mystery via habit. They move constantly toward the possible as detectives, and they seek the replication of habits in order to maintain with regularity their movement toward that possibility. The sharpest of them all, the detective Bucket, strives quite habitually to categorize, organize, and order people in terms of their habits. He tells Snagsby, for example, that he is “a man of the world” and “a man of business” (286–287)—informing Snagsby of what he customarily is while interpreting what Snagsby is at the same time. Later Bucket tells George, who has said he was in fine spirits: “That’s your sort! . . . Why should you ever

have been otherwise? A man of your fine figure and constitution has no right to be out of spirits” (627). Just as Skimpole loudly observes habits in order to encourage others to continue enacting habits (and thus reliably bring him to more claret, coffee, and newspapers (65)), Bucket’s habitual declaration of others’ customs flatters them, compelling them to behave accordingly. Ongoing patterns develop in this way, patterns for such characters’ pursuit of gain and information. Near the conclusion of the novel, Bucket gushes about pattern while addressing Esther. ““You’re a pattern, you know, that’s what you are,’ said Mr. Bucket warmly; ‘you’re a pattern’” (745). Here, Bucket at once praises Esther as a model fit for imitation and suggests that she also fits a mold, fits a pattern.¹¹⁶ Like De Quincey, Bucket repetitively recognizes patterns; habitually, he announces that he perceives habit. Bucket does not seem to find anything wrong with this, and indeed, he achieves a certain amount of success as an investigator, orchestrating patterns that he can then continually interpret. In Skimpole’s case, such thinking is all the more clearly addiction-like, because he is himself pursuing possibilities of addictive consumption, and through a number of characters like Skimpole and Bucket, the novel continually presents habits used in this manner, as narrative-world-producing pathways to possibility.

In his own life, Dickens himself was a creature of habits who compulsively rearranged the things around him. “He was an obsessive organizer of his surroundings, even rearranging the furniture in hotel rooms,” writes Claire Tomalin, echoing the Certeauvian consumer who inhabits a text like a “rented apartment.” The obsessive

¹¹⁶ John Jordan has written in a recent study, *Supposing Bleak House*, that Esther’s own patterning extends throughout the novel, producing a narrative that both reflects and re-enacts. He notes “the structure of repetition that characterizes Esther’s narrative,” which means that by “retelling it, she is in effect re-experiencing it as she writes, and this re-experience has the potential to shed new light, for her as well as for the reader, on events that have already happened” (4–5).

organizing habits are described by Tomalin adjacent to his other obsessions:

He smoked cigars, and often mentions his wine-dealers in letters, and the brandy, gin, port, sherry, champagne, claret and Sauternes delivered and enjoyed; and although he was very rarely the worse for drink, he sometimes confessed to feeling bad in the mornings after overindulging the night before. (xlv–xlvi)

The reader of *Bleak House* passes through a London obsessively arranged by similarly hungry habitués.

Unstable habits suggestive of ongoing change and always-emerging difference support in *Bleak House* an epistemology of habits used to navigate mystery. Guppy, another flawed investigator, speaks confidently of the deceased Krook that truth is “what we know of his habits” (429). But those habits, like so many others in the novel, are suggestive of much possibility and strangeness. Krook’s death of spontaneous combustion, for instance, is a relative singularity whose possibility Dickens vigorously defended in a later introduction to the novel (xxvii). Dickens, in that introduction, is adamantly convinced of the existence of routine spontaneity, or a regular irregularity. It is routine spontaneity that had, furthermore, been directly linked to alcohol habit, that most unstable form of routine.¹¹⁷ The addiction-like here most clearly resembles routine strangeness, or habitual encounters with something rather imaginative. This addiction-like logic shared by so many characters and structuring the narrative of *Bleak House* combines both investigative study and imaginative adventure. Brooke Taylor describes this combination in her summary of the long-running debate over spontaneous

¹¹⁷ A number of works by the nineteenth century’s novelists include scenes of alcoholics bursting into flames. Melville in *Redburn*, Gogol in *Dead Souls*, and Verne in *Un capitaine de quinze ans* all illustrated such an occurrence. For an overview, see Jan Bondeson, *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities*, 18–19.

combustion in the novel—a debate running from G.H. Lewes’s early criticism of its unscientific basis through contemporary scholarly defenses of the scene’s metaphorical importance (172).¹¹⁸ Taylor argues that Dickens “had to insist science was on his side in order to make his case for the imagination” (172).

Not everyone is so at ease with wild, imaginative science; Bucket’s almost anxious efforts to reduce everything to sets of habits and patterns (urging people to become even more patterned) intimates an attempt to avoid irregularity. Bucket represents an uneasiness with what many other characters in the novel experience or intuit: something thrilling and discontinuous accessed by way of so many habits. The physician Woodcourt notices that strangeness seeping through at the bodily, material level.¹¹⁹ When he bears the body of the orphan Jo through the city, Woodcourt “revolves in his mind how and where he shall bestow his companion. ‘It surely is a strange fact,’ he considers, ‘that in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog.’ But it is none the less a fact because of its strangeness” (591).¹²⁰ As a doctor, Woodcourt solves problems through professional routine. He recognizes the limits to this method, though. He understands that the body fails to conform reliably to idealized patterns.

Skimpole’s Labyrinth

¹¹⁸ See Daniel Hack’s “Sublimation Strange”: Allegory and Authority in *Bleak House*.” Hack sees in the novel’s take on spontaneous combustion a rejection of science’s authority (see especially 134–135).

¹¹⁹ And as a professional, Woodcourt is all the more familiar with approaching his strange world through repetitiousness: Mary Poovey describes how repetition constitutes nineteenth-century professionalized reality, articulated through “domains that mirror each other even as their practitioners proclaim the esoterica of specialization” (4).

¹²⁰ Sympathetic narrative and disease intertwine here, through an uncanny strangeness wherein outside and inside join bodily. As Julia Epstein writes in *Altered Conditions*, “Human bodies are ‘carriers’ not only of pathogens but also of stories that explain our lives” (19).

Skimpole speaks happily and routinely of that strangeness. He drifts about with a loudly proclaimed mystification at nearly everything, that mystification used to call for others to support his own addictive habits, including customary consumption of claret and coffee: “Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more” (*Bleak House* 65). He invokes bewilderment at the world generating so many pleasures; others then rush to take care of Skimpole in terms of the consumerist habits he has described to them.

The Jarndyce circle is largely convinced by Skimpole’s speech, the habits he invokes, and his emotional confusion. John Jarndyce, who accepts Skimpole with little suspicion, approvingly tells Esther that the man is “all sentiment—and susceptibility, and—and sensibility, and—and imagination” (551). It takes a craftily “susceptible” character to pull this ruse off—a mind both imaginative and calculatingly focused—and Skimpole has access to just the right Shelleyan addiction-like strategies represented by earlier Romantics (namely Leigh Hunt), which he uses to inspire John Jarndyce to become a habitual enabler of his craving.

Other addict-like knowers in *Bleak House* achieve more limited power. Tulkinghorn, the lawyer who pursues an investigation into the secrets of his clients the Dedlocks, “enjoys his wine,” and little else beyond power (284). Esther asks Lady Dedlock, of Tulkinghorn, “Has he so little pity or compunction?” to which Lady Dedlock replies, “He has none, and no anger. He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets, and the holding possession of such power as they give him” (475). His sole interests—wine-drinking and investigation—are those of intensified

movement toward more and more. He lacks, in other words, Skimpole's expansive interests in multiple kinds of enjoyments and consumptions—Skimpole, then, is more broadly attuned to the addiction-like. Skimpole speaks of “the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret,” whereas Tulkinghorn speaks mostly of his investigation and enjoys mostly only his wine. And while Skimpole thrives masterfully as a strategic manipulator, Tulkinghorn is ultimately murdered by Hortense, the French maid he used in his investigation of her employer, Lady Dedlock. What Hortense wanted from Tulkinghorn all along was simply a new position. “I am not yet placed,” she says. “Place me well” (547). Tulkinghorn does not; Hortense kills him. Skimpole, more broadly contemplative, is quite adept at giving people a place, a function, or a role reinforced by his addiction-like, compelling, intensely patterned language. Tulkinghorn is not, and he is thus trapped.

Indeed, talking to Hortense, Tulkinghorn compares his lockable wine-cellar to a prison (548). And even his investigations have a flavor of too much literal addictive consumption; earlier, when Tulkinghorn enters the scene of Nemo's death, he inhales the man's narcotic remains. After he enters the room where Nemo (a mysterious figure whose true identity places him central to multiple storylines in the novel) has died, “there comes into the lawyer's mouth the bitter, vapid taste of opium” (127). In this world understood to connect so bodily with its inhabitants through excessive substances of commerce (alcohol, tobacco, and opium), it proves perilous to come too close to those substances.¹²¹ The London of *Bleak House* is a dangerous place of oozing physicality,

¹²¹ Dickens himself had sought to understand vexing problems of justice in an age when crime was explicitly known in terms of habit (1869 saw the passing of the Habitual Criminals Act). Addiction may have become a property of Victorian investigation after De Quincey, but it also came to characterize Victorian criminality, as with the uncontrollable alcoholic or the skulking opium-eater.

and not just in terms of the substances consumed, but also with regard to fog, gaslights, dripping pipes, sooty streets—of so much stuff that obscures permanently graspable truth.¹²² For Richard Carstone, who eventually dies of consumption, the fog becomes too much. Led into this labyrinth—placed here—by Skimpole, the architect of his sorrows who brings Richard into company of the more explicitly predatory Vholes (495), Richard sinks into illness, and when it is suggested that he enlist in the aid of the more benevolent doctor Woodcourt, he responds that “he is only an outsider and is not in the mysteries. We have gone into them, and he has not. He can’t be expected to know much of such a labyrinth” (646). Unlike Hortense, Richard has been placed, and his place is the labyrinth cunningly built by Skimpole’s patterns.¹²³

Mieke Bal has noticed the role of narrative patterning in forming novelistic places in general: “The semantic content of spatial aspects can be constructed in the same way as the semantic content of a character,” she writes, and she lists repetition as one of these methods of constructing meaning for both character and space (135–136). The characterization and place-making in *Bleak House*’s depiction of addictive consumption show just how much formal and semantic narrative-work can be done by the intensified repetitions of Dickensian consumers of addictive substances. Those consumers pattern novelistic worlds intensely due to the intensity of their habits. Forging repetitive connections between disparate phenomena, altering themselves and their surroundings by

¹²² Nineteenth-century London, then, became described more emphatically as a city of chaotic multitude, of fog, of randomness. “For a city like London,” writes Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*, “could not easily be described in a rhetorical gesture of repressive uniformity. On the contrary, its miscellaneity, its crowded variety, its randomness of movement, were the most apparent things about it” (153–154).

¹²³ It’s worth remembering that the slyly repetitious Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* is no addict, but he, like Skimpole, seeks to control others by mastering linguistic patterning that alludes to some exalted mysterious power. He insists in spite of his ambition, “I’m a very umble person . . . I am well aware that I am the umblest person going . . . I am much too umble” (250).

repeating sequentially as they avariciously chase some impossible end, these addicts are effective story-makers and place-makers, engines for the most expansive, episodically repeated narratives of labyrinthine place.

In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (another mystery novel in which opium has a role), Dickens describes yet another habitual consumer's creation of a realm, through the character of Mr. Sapsea, who says,

If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man, foreign countries have come to me. They have come to me in the way of business, and I have improved upon my opportunities . . . I see a French clock. I never saw him before, in my life, but I instantly lay my finger on him and say 'Paris!' I see some cups and saucers of Chinese make, equally strangers to me personally: I put my finger on them, then and there, and I say 'Pekin, Nankin, and Canton.' (26)

Through the act of consuming, Sapsea has connected himself to a vaster realm, bridging Paris with China. He has done so steadily over time, through commerce that repeatedly links disparate places. Raymond Williams found this contradictory union between the obscurely unfamiliar and pattern to be Dickens' great technical discovery, one that reflected developments in urban living. "Dickens's creation of a new kind of novel," Williams writes, "can be directly related to what we must see as this double condition: the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured, which is the true significance of the city" (154). That city, where one endlessly makes one's way through confusing twists and turns, where familiarity coexists with elusive, strange facts about materiality, is a murky labyrinth that can support an endless quest into the obscure. John

Kucich observes that “Dickens makes a form of radical release present for the reader, not as a single moment but as an experience repeated endlessly by the writing” (197), and such endless episodic movement toward the possible is lived out in *Bleak House* by multiple characters making their way through a mazy city. This intensely repetitive orientation toward possibility is, if not always represented by addicted characters, seen vividly in the addictive habits of those consumers who participate in structuring the novel’s labyrinthine world.

George Eliot and Intoxicating Science

Addiction-like behaviors sustain patterns of desirous cognition in *Bleak House*,¹²⁴ but such thinking is easy to find elsewhere, too, such as in the novels of George Eliot.¹²⁵ *Middlemarch* in particular exhibits the failure of dry intellectualism and unreflective feeling, all while showing more successful, addict-like thinkers in the novel who achieve some combination of thought with feeling. One of those thinkers benefits from an explicitly DeQuinceyan education in the consumption of addictive substances: this is Will Ladislaw, who at last marries Dorothea Brooke after her marriage to the obsessive, failed scholar Casaubon.

¹²⁴ The union of subjective desire and scientific pursuit fascinated novelists of an earlier era, too. Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600–1740* characterizes Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* as a “descent to the subjective roots of objective and empirical reality,” although it then turns “so productively to the stabilizing of that reality that it can be treated as though it had never happened (337).

¹²⁵ Eliot often calls for thinking in light of emotional, imaginative energy. “The driest argument has its hallucinations,” observes her Daniel Deronda, as he considers the enthusiastic ideas of the Jewish nationalist Mordecai (438). At this point in the George Eliot novel that bears his name, Deronda is well on his way to an imaginative yet reasoned identification with fellow Jews. Reflecting on impassioned arguments for such identification, he ponders how “even strictly-measuring science could hardly have got on without that forecasting ardour which feels the agitations of discovery beforehand” (438). The idea here is that even the most reasonable involvement with the world outside of one’s subjective self takes some emotionally imaginative drive. As George Levine has put it in “*Daniel Deronda: A New Epistemology*,” the novel demonstrates how “‘objectivity’ can never be divorced from feeling” (73). Richard Dellamora notes “an experimental approach to human relationships, in particular, to friendship” in *Daniel Deronda* (129).

Ladislaw has experimented with opium in a youthful attempt to follow De Quincey's path, but after his opium experiments, we are told, "[n]othing greatly original had resulted from these measures; and the effects of the opium had convinced him that there was an entire dissimilarity between his constitution and De Quincey's" (53). This turns out to have been a formative moment for young Ladislaw. He had, like De Quincey, witnessed in his physical being something far from "original."¹²⁶ This realization—that even one's solitary selfhood is repetitive, unoriginal—guides Ladislaw's thinking thereafter, as he becomes a thinker no longer addicted but addict-like. He is on two occasions compared not to De Quincey, but to Shelley, the famed vegetarian and sober poet, the expansively imaginative aesthete of healthier material habits (*Middlemarch* 224 and 310). This wiser, sober Ladislaw behaves in more thoughtfully emotional ways, as his reasonable love for Dorothea shows.

When Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon fails, and when her own love for Ladislaw develops, she develops an interest in more expansive consideration of the strange, the surprising. She and Will unite in a moment of surprise, when together they reflect on something unexpected. They have been standing

looking at the evergreens which were being tossed, and were showing the pale underside of their leaves against the blackening sky. Will never enjoyed the prospect of a storm so much: it delivered him from the necessity of going away. Leaves and little branches were hurled about, and the thunder was getting nearer. The light was more and more sombre, but

¹²⁶ Interconnecting matter, habitually experienced in *Middlemarch*, has been examined by Kate Flint, who writes of "the potential of material objects to bear witness to the processes of social history that underpin the world of the text, even though those may go largely unremarked upon by the narrator"—this can, in turn, "relate to the perceptual and emotional habits and responses of those who own, wear, observe, or dispose of them" (66). See "The Materiality of *Middlemarch*."

there came a flash of lightning which made them start and look at each other, and then smile. (498)

A moment of discontinuity disrupts their quiet attention—the lightning strikes—and they look at each other in an instance of sympathetically shared recognition of the startling.¹²⁷

The recovered addict and the recovered wife of an obsessive scholar understand and apply more expansive, addiction-like thinking toward the startling, the unknown; that is, they apply continuous attention to possibility. *Middlemarch* is shaped by such habituated characters who pursue knowledge and often suffer because of excessively self-contained habits (Casaubon dies in a loveless marriage, as does the doctor Lydgate). But Ladislav, the recovered opium-eater—who has become merely addict-like and Shelleyan—figures out how to live thoughtfully and sympathetically with strangeness.

Ladislav's learning via repetitive, addictive encounters with otherness models the overall experience of reading *Middlemarch*, a narrative that looks over a multitude of characters in terms of their habits and thus locates proliferating difference in repetition: this is why it is useful to consider *Middlemarch* a text that employs addiction-like devices.

¹²⁷ Dorothea had not always been so skilled at this. Early in the novel, the narrator remarks, We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (135)

Dorothea will, as the novel progresses, come to recognize such differences quite clearly, though with acknowledgment of continuities connecting these differences. Ladislav provides a connecting thread through the experiences that lead to that recognition. After misguidedly believing that she has lost Ladislav to Rosamond, Dorothea learns that, while in fact Rosamond is unhappy in her own marriage to Lydgate, Ladislav remains unattached to her imagined rival. The initial sense of fury toward Rosamond transmutes to sympathy, by which greater knowledge is gained. In this epiphanic moment, difference connects to patterned sameness:

All the active thought with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of Lydgate's lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own, seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles—all this vivid sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance. (485–486)

And because Ladislav ultimately navigates his realm securely and wisely, the novel implies that addiction-like thought produces a fuller awareness of its world. *Middlemarch* provides, then, a happier sense of addiction-like thinking than *Bleak House*; the repetitive encounters with difference in Eliot's novel lead not to a murky labyrinth for Ladislav, but to a summarized happy existence by the novel's close. Like Dickens, Eliot displays the addiction-like as an investigative, exploratory mode that also further shapes a world of repetitive difference, but her sense of investigation differs from Dickens's. Studied in science—including Darwinian thought—Eliot would describe a more confident, scientific sense of variety emerging from habits.

The addiction-like habits Eliot represents are often very much like Darwinian habits: through them—as Ladislav demonstrates—characters alter themselves, change those around them, and study those changes. Two types of Darwinian habits concern us here: those of the scientist's repetitive study (repeatedly reading, experimenting, and investigating) and those objects that the scientist actually studies (the habits of creatures that guide those creatures on their evolving paths). Figured as addiction-like, these habits become one—because addictive patterns both lead to thinking about possibility and alter the knower into a possible new form—and Eliot does combine both kinds of Darwinian habit in *Middlemarch* through characters like Ladislav. In his case, addiction and addiction-like thinking lead both to change *and* enhanced awareness of a changing world of variety. The novel doesn't rely strictly on a Darwinian strategy or addiction-like strategy, then—it applies both.

Eliot on Affective Science

Eliot was familiar with an array of scientific texts that linked addiction-like, repetitive thrills with exploration. From Romantic science to positivist philosophy, she had encountered a multitude of statements on repetitive experiences that were supposed to provide both scientific understanding and the pleasure of formal continuity or sublimity.

Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, with its insight into the connection between hallucination and dry argument, contains assertions that emotional imagination and science both emanate from and move toward some inexpressible thing. The novel starts by describing the relationship between science and poetry through shared orientation toward strangeness:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off *in media res*. (3)

This sense of imaginative sympathy combined with scientific work had its roots in Eliot's study of science and philosophy. She and her eventual husband George Henry Lewes were mutually drawn to the ideal of a society founded upon both sympathy and science, stemming from their "enthusiasm for Comte's Positivist Philosophy" (Ashton

106).¹²⁸ Auguste Comte had in his *Système de Politique Positive* outlined a religion of humanity that would join scientific, systematic thinking with habitual sympathetic dreaminess—a religion combining system with the unsystematic. “The heart and the intellect concur,” for Comte’s religion, both “indispensable to the true love or the true understanding of the Great Being, the condition of such love or understanding being the right appreciation of the several periods of unsystematic preparation that must precede its systematic creation” (Comte 452). The union of heart and intellect under the religion envisaged by Comte would inspire habitual pursuit of knowledge: “*To know in order to improve*, the motto of our primeval ancestors, will equally, with our remotest posterity, be the expression used to indicate the bounden duty of the intellect to devote itself continuously to the service of society” (Comte 450). A key word here is “continuously”: Comte calls for regular, repetitive service through lovingly intellectual existence.¹²⁹

Knowledge and the passions had been linked by others already, including Romantic intellectuals who stressed that knowledge would occur with sensitivity to the unknown, the possible, the thrillingly mysterious. While once “laws of nature and nature’s God appeared . . . one and the same,” as Carl Becker observes in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, during

¹²⁸ Avrom Fleishman has written that Eliot diverges from Comte in some key ways, especially in her anticipation of “much of the argument in philosophical hermeneutics on the distinction between the natural and the human sciences,” specifically with regard to her interest in “social history” and her suggestion “that particularistic attention to the complexity and subtlety of the common life may lie beyond scholarly accounts altogether, calling for another mode of writing (90).

¹²⁹ As Martha Nussbaum puts it, Comte contends “that the time for religion has passed. No longer need we explain our dealings with one another in the religious language of godliness and sin: instead, we learn to understand the laws of human social interaction through empirical research” (Nussbaum 8). The ethical laws Comte describes need a social structure that mirrors scientific, empirical research: “According to Comte, the new sympathy must, like traditional religion, include rituals that organize the day and festivals that demarcate the seasons of the year” (Nussbaum 9). Thoughtful and sympathetic repetitions of the reasonable scientist could replace ritual. Investigating reality scientifically thus might support a new, sympathetic, humane religion, one based on formal patterning that could accept the unsystematic and the routine, ongoing nature of a never-satisfied positivist science.

the course of the nineteenth century this optimistic outlook became overcast. . . Natural philosophy was transformed into natural science. Natural science became science . . . Professors of science ceased to speak with any assurance of the laws of nature, and were content to pursue, with *unabated ardor* [my italicized emphasis], but without any teleological implications whatever, their proper business of observing and experimenting with the something which is the stuff of the universe. (Becker 22)

Immanuel Kant provided some of the groundwork for this tendency to study a sublimely mysterious universe through unabated ardor. He argued for a union of the sensitive imagination with empirical observation, finding the transcendent meeting of the two in aesthetic appreciation. Specifically, perceived formal pattern could awaken this transcendent aesthetic understanding. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes:

The consciousness of the causality of a representation in respect of the state of the subject as one tending *to preserve a continuance* of that state, may here be said to denote in a general way what is called pleasure; whereas displeasure is that representation which contains the ground for converting the state of the representations into their opposite (for hindering or removing them). (Kant 51)

The mind perceives in its world patterned continuity, by which the world can be known pleasurably, aesthetically, and formally.

As Deleuze writes in *Kant's Critical Philosophy*:

. . . what representation can, in aesthetic judgment, have this higher pleasure as its effect? Since the material existence of the object remains indifferent, it is once again a case of the representation of a pure form. But this time it is a form of the object . . . Form is the aspect of an object which the imagination reflects, as opposed to the material element of the sensations which this object provokes in so far as it exists and acts upon us.

(47)

Pleasure and knowledge in this Kantian world come, again, from encounters with form derived out of the material realm, and there can be no form without some element of repetition, some calling back to that which precedes or is adjacent. When that formal appreciation leads to confrontation of something much bigger from which those forms emerge or in which those forms dissolve, a second type of aesthetic experience results, different from the more contained sort of pleasure found in neat forms, and this is the sublime aesthetic experience.

Alexander von Humboldt, whose work represented a union between Kantian aesthetics and scientific exploration, insisted on joining sublimity with exploration of material phenomena. In *Cosmos*, Humboldt argues that there is a “magic power exercised upon our minds by the physical world, since the character of the landscape, and of every imposing scene in nature, depends so materially upon the mutual relation of the ideas and sentiments simultaneously excited in the mind of the observer” (Humboldt 5–6). Ideas and sentiments are excited simultaneously here, and that excitement depends on formal pattern and material variety. Humboldt, as one biographer puts it, “agreed with Kant that a different approach to science was needed, one that could account for the harmony of

nature that lay beneath the apparent diversity of the physical world” (Helferich 27). The aesthetically pleasing harmony of nature’s formal patterns and the thrills of nature’s material diversity can suggest one another; Humboldt, sensing this, was prepared to pursue knowledge with “unabated ardor,” registering harmonious patterns along with constant novelty. Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative* offers readers moments, as Aaron Sachs describes them, “of vision and confusion, of familiarity and strangeness, of ecstasy and nausea” (47). Sachs is responding to the Humboldt who writes, “Nature is an inexhaustible source of investigation,” and notes that Humboldt declares this “almost giddily,” excited by the prospect that “you can always find something new and bizarre” (Sachs 48). Always, the scientist can find something new; consistently, the scientist can find something inconsistent.

Darwin, Humboldtian Science, and the Habitual Production of New Worlds

The repetitive scientific adventure into strangeness took on new significance after Charles Darwin described the natural world as itself repetitively shifting into something new. The scientist, who via experiment repeatedly sought something new, thus became contained within what was studied—a world of repetitive change. Darwin had adopted Humboldt’s sense of ecological interconnection that suggests ongoing possibility and novelty—ecological interconnection that seems to promise worldly change along with scientific discovery. “In his later years,” as Iain McCalman writes, “Darwin was to say that the whole course of his life was due to having, as a young man, read and reread Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative*” (McCalman 41).¹³⁰ Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*

¹³⁰ Like Humboldt, Darwin saw in his world “a web of complex relations” (*Origin of Species* 140). As Sachs writes, “The closest readers of Darwin realized that large parts of his theories were in fact derived

emphasizes the ordinary linked to the extraordinary, in especially strong terms, by discussing habit that produces difference. He relates habit to in-process habitation, making his epoch-forming case about the effect of habitual movement toward otherness, also known as evolution. Darwin writes:

It has been asked by the opponents of such views as I hold, how, for instance, a land carnivorous animal could have been converted into one with aquatic habits; for how could the animal in its transitional state have subsisted? It would be easy to show that within the same group carnivorous animals exist having every intermediate grade between truly aquatic and strictly terrestrial habits; and as each exists by a struggle for life, it is clear that each is well adapted in its habits to its place in nature. (207)

This is no stable habitual repetition. This repetition is responsive to surroundings, profoundly related ecologically with environment, and pressing consequently toward mutation.¹³¹ The habitué, once again, alters its ecological surroundings even as its surroundings alter it.¹³² There are strange new worlds developing from all this habitual,

directly from Humboldt, for evolution was essentially ecological. ‘We may all be netted together,’ Darwin mused in the late 1830s, and web-of-life imagery appears in much of his work” (241). And Darwin’s work in general reflected his early reading in the Romantics—he had broadly read and thought his way through British Romantic literature (Beer 26 and 27). Gillian Beer cites Wordsworth as one influence: “The idea of things held in common, of the extraordinary kinships implicit in the ordinary, is deeply felt by Darwin, whom we know to have immersed himself in Wordsworth’s [*Excursion*]” (Beer 44). Beer notices a specifically literary, imaginative strain in Darwin’s work: “*The Origin of Species*,” she writes, “is in its way a polemical book, a work which drives *through* fiction and observation to achieve a condition beyond fiction” (46).

¹³¹ Darwin also suggested that scientific pursuit could resemble continuous intoxication. Quoting Francis Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, he writes in an epigraph: “let no man out of a weak conceit of sobriety . . . think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God’s word, or in the book of God’s works” (*Origins* 89). Engagement both with the book and the works are associated here with intellectually useful insobriety.

¹³² There would be, in general, overlap between addiction discourse’s senses of habits and Darwinian views of habit. Earlier in the century, the pioneering expert on addiction Benjamin Rush had already connected habits with heredity, noting, “It is further remarkable, that drunkenness resembles certain hereditary, family, and contagious diseases” (Rush 7–8). Darwin would more thoroughly and definitively connect habit to heredity through inhabitation, to the place given an experienced shape by habits that alter habitués. This

interconnecting experience, in other words, worlds suggesting the sublime diversity seen by the aesthetically sensitive scientist Humboldt. Humboldtian science for Darwin had thus become a method for charting our world that repeatedly, continually shifts toward novelty.¹³³ Through Darwin, Humboldtian science of repeated exploration allowed the registering of realms of similarly, repeatedly developed strangeness. The method matches that which it is used to study. George Levine has observed that a “Darwinian wrinkle in the scientific preoccupation with observation is that for Darwin, the observer becomes . . . the observed” (*Darwin and the Novelists* 15). The pursuit of knowledge works, in the case of the post-Humboldt scientist, as an intensely repetitive pursuit that leads to intense involvement in worlds that are already, similarly, repeatedly coming into new shape.

The Darwinian *Middlemarch*

In the case of *Middlemarch*, Darwinian knowledge of the world’s repetitive movement toward strangeness is achieved by living through that repetitive strangeness intensely—by opium experimentation, by marrying an obsessive scholar, or perhaps by simply reading Eliot’s narrative of habitual, varied characters. Eliot had pondered *On the Origin of Species* along with Lewes, first encountering the book in 1859,¹³⁴ and a major strand of scholarship has focused on the ongoing conversation Eliot thereafter held with

can seem brutally limiting, and it colored the concerns about bad habits in the nineteenth century. Athena Vrettos has noted, “Many feared that if the human psyche was biologically compelled to repeat mental experiences, and thus to trap the individual in predictable and inflexible patterns of behavior, this compulsion constrained possibilities for change and challenged conceptions of free will” (Vrettos 400). Susan Zieger discusses briefly how Darwin actually dealt with a more in-between sort of habit, part inherited, part willed (Zieger 8).

¹³³ “The grotesque, the beautiful and the wonderful in the everyday was a major Victorian imaginative theme. The study of ‘fact’ was for Dickens and for Carlyle and for Hopkins an exploration of the fantastic” (Beer 74–75).

¹³⁴ A.J. Lustig in an essay titled “George Eliot, Charles Darwin and the Labyrinth of History,” provides a brief overview of Eliot’s reading of Darwin in order to explore the two thinkers’ shared thoughts about a non-teleological, interconnected historical development.

Darwinian ideas.¹³⁵ Gillian Beer, for instance, describes how Eliot's narration emphasizes characters' feelings while displaying Darwinian variety within rigid patterns: "Even while we are observing how closely human beings conform in the taxonomy of events," she writes, "we learn how differently they think and feel" (Beer 143).¹³⁶ The idea here is that Eliot, influenced by Darwinian science's taxonomical, authoritative views of variety and otherness, shows how examining otherness can offer insight into the variety of feelings.¹³⁷

Middlemarch demonstrates this thinking-feeling union throughout its narrative; the taxonomizing, authoritative narrator shows thinking and feeling coming together in those who desirously seek to taxonomize and understand. Their various emotional orientations lead such characters to different thoughts and desires. Casaubon's study is altogether too limited in its intensely focused passion; he behaves as a self-destructive investigator, obsessed with his study. Ladislav has been through that self-destructive phase of habit-forming study and come out the other side a healthier, more sympathetic thinker, wiser about the interconnection to others that he now senses. Dorothea first weds Casaubon out of loving respect for his pursuit, then she too comes to recognize its shortcomings, its aridity. The better knower and more sympathetic husband is the

¹³⁵ See Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

¹³⁶ In George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists*, he examines a broader influence of evolutionary science on the British novel. "Science enters most Victorian fiction," Levine writes, "not so much in the shape of ideas, as, quite literally, in the shape of its shape, its form, as well as in the patterns it exploits and develops" (13).

¹³⁷ For a recent analysis of sympathy in *Middlemarch*, see Kornbluh's "The Economic Problem of Sympathy: Parabasis, Interest, and Realist Form in *Middlemarch*." Kornbluh specifically describes sympathy in the novel with regard to finance capitalism, especially in the wake of "Peel's Act of 1844, the Limited Liability Act of 1855, and the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856" (942). David Trotter has examined the way Eliot's world is navigated by emotional trajectories, specifically desire; Trotter points out that sexual desire exists through spatial movement in *Middlemarch* (see his chapter "Space, Movement, and Sexual Feeling in *Middlemarch*").

recovered addict, who knows how bound he is to material externality and who can soberly think about the broader range of that externality. Like Darwin, Ladislav has recognized that he is part of what is studied; like Humboldt, Ladislav feelingly recognizes the broader, complicated nature of his realm.

There are in *Middlemarch*—beyond Ladislav’s example—a number of allusions to addictive substances related to experimental learning. Dr. Lydgate, for instance, was influenced

by the publication of Dr Ware’s abundant experience in America, as to the right way of treating cases of alcoholic poisoning . . . Lydgate, when abroad, had already been interested in this question: he was strongly convinced against the prevalent practice of allowing alcohol and persistently administering large doses of opium; and he had repeatedly acted on this conviction with a favourable result. (433)

The awareness of addictive substances’ dangers comes to Lydgate through repeated experiments; he knows about addiction through similar, correctively patterned thinking.¹³⁸ Ladislav, while self-medicating, learned the same thing, only Ladislav more directly lives out a connection between addiction and medical experiment. His experimentation is that much more addiction-like because it is linked to his previous addictive experience.

Lydgate’s failure poses a challenge to nineteenth-century ideals of the

¹³⁸ In a conversation connected to Lydgate, the doctor who pursues grand scientific knowledge, Mr Brooke says, “every dose you take is an experiment—an experiment, you know” (*Middlemarch* 60).

professional, relatively unemotional physician.¹³⁹ Victorians had seen the rise of professional medicine with stricter guidelines; legislation during the mid-Victorian period especially bolstered the professional nature and dominance of certified doctors. The Medical Act of 1858 resulted in the General Medical Council and the Medical Register, clarifying the nature of the Victorian medical profession (for more on this, see Debbie Harrison 55). Lawrence Rothfield in *Vital Signs* examines how this rise of the medical profession interacted with the development of the nineteenth-century novel in a way conducive to more comprehensive, authoritative, knowing narration. Clinical medical discourse, according to Rothfield, not only shows up repeatedly in realist novels; it works in accordance with a diagnostic point of view that characterizes realism—“both Balzac and Flaubert,” Rothfield notes, “compare themselves to ‘medical’ observers” (84–85). This medicalized narration would value clinical knowledge. Yet as De Quincey, Dickens, and Eliot show, rigorous investigation and medical experiment could be found to carry destabilizing elements, too, and in their work professional scientific investigation also worked as a vehicle for adventuring unpredictably into strange variety.¹⁴⁰

Middlemarch draws from such professional authority for its overview of emotional variety, and it complicates that authority in doing so.¹⁴¹ Much of the narrative is produced by knowers of professional habits—Lydgate and Casaubon, especially—yet

¹³⁹ See Alan Mintz’s *George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation*. Mintz writes that in *Middlemarch*, Eliot’s “focus on the experience of work and vocation” works as an antidote to “a moribund preoccupation with romantic love” (55).

¹⁴⁰ “Fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century was particularly seeking sources of authoritative organisation which could substitute for the god-like omnipotence and omniscience open to the theistic narrator,” Beer writes (149), yet those same sources of authority also connoted a loss of control to materiality. William St. Clair describes leading Victorian minds’ “hope that they could reject both the supernatural and historical claims of religion without at the same time opening the way to moral chaos or to an entirely materialist alternative world view. Wordsworth and Coleridge, and above all Shelley, seemed to offer a way through” (428).

¹⁴¹ Rothfield writes, “Although the clinical perspective remains central, the novel [*Middlemarch*] makes room for entire sets of characters and plots imagined according to rules that do not match those of the clinic but that nevertheless have the ring of truth” (88).

these similarly patterned characters are different from one another and come to different ends. Barbara Hardy has noted this collision of ironic discontinuity and continuity in Eliot's work via recurrence—Eliot's "irony, her continuity, and her presentation of change and collision, depend to some extent on repetitions" (Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot* 8).¹⁴²

Ladislaw, the former opium-eater, understands discontinuity in pattern, too. He senses that there is something unoriginal (and thus repetitive) in his solitary, singular experience, and he exhibits a more thorough feeling for others. He succeeds where some studiously professional characters fail. Barbara Hardy has observed that "Casaubon's failure, interestingly enough, lies both in ardour and intellect, George Eliot's concept of knowledge being one of integrated ardour and learning. The integration is there in Lydgate, as far as his science is concerned, but it is imperfectly sustained in his human relations" (*The Novels of George Eliot* 64). Ladislaw is as ambitious as the other two, and perhaps even more passionately hungry for knowledge. Again, however, his drug experiments have produced humility in him, a sense of his physical particularity being quite like that of others. "Nothing greatly original had resulted from [his opium experimentation]," as Eliot notes, "and the effects of the opium had convinced him that there was an entire dissimilarity between his constitution and De Quincey's" (53). He has found that he is different in his constitution, yet not greatly original—unoriginally different.

The addict-like Ladislaw makes his way wisely through a world of sameness-

¹⁴² This is a form that can unite a swarm of egoists. Frederic Jameson notes in George Eliot's work, "as compared with Dickens, for example . . . a significantly enhanced proximity to the relationships between individuals, a kind of intensified and virtually photographic enlargement of those barely perceptible adjustments to the Other" (Jameson, "Experiments of Time" 121–122).

within-difference, a Darwinian world of both never-ending patterns and never-eliminated novelty. That world has firm boundaries and categories yet maintains its uncharted discontinuities. Repeatedly, Eliot turns to the figure of the labyrinth to describe both this intellectual experience and the world around that experience, often shaped and produced by its inhabitants. Dorothea and the obsessive researcher Casaubon, for instance, are observed to dwell in such a labyrinth.¹⁴³ Dorothea “had looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon’s mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought” (16). This labyrinth is not, merely, Casaubon’s. Dorothea had, for example, previously been “hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth” (19). Those social labyrinths she thought she might escape with Casaubon are replicated in his intellectual labyrinth. But through marriage to a recovered addict, schooled in the labyrinths of De Quincey, Dorothea finds someone similarly interested in a stably sympathetic form of habitual existence, someone with whom she can settle into a cosmic sense of connection with “the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs” (515). The difference between Ladislav and Casaubon is rather like the difference between a “maze-treader” (Casaubon) and a “maze-viewer,” to use Penelope Reed Doob’s terms. Doob writes, “maze-treaders, whose vision ahead and behind is severely constricted and fragmented, suffer confusion, whereas maze-viewers who see the pattern whole, from above or in a diagram, are dazzled by its complex artistry” (1). Ladislav is both Romantically and scientifically dazzled by the labyrinth. He thinks in an addiction-*like* way; he is merely and safely a maze-viewer.

The maze-viewer’s is, in its purest state, a summary existence, absent of dramatic,

¹⁴³ Gillian Beer writes of “the web of the human body and its contiguous image, the labyrinth, which will become of such importance . . . in *Middlemarch*” (160).

up-close problems of selfishness. This is the existence of Ladislav and Dorothea at the close of *Middlemarch*, neatly summarized as an existence alongside “the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs” (515). Gérard Genette writes that summary was, “up to the end of the nineteenth century, the most usual transition between two scenes, the ‘background’ against which scenes stand out, and thus the connective tissue par excellence of novelistic narrative” (97). Dorothea’s narrative takes her through trying scenes that break the habitual flow of summary up until the final, summarized state with the post-De Quincey Ladislav. The two find at last a sceneless life comprising habitual sympathetic existence; addiction-like thinking brings them to this sustained, maze-viewing summary.

Earlier in the novel, the narrator offers more insight into why addiction-like thinking might produce such powerful understanding in this novel: the narrator locates the soul itself in overwhelming repetition. As Lydgate’s future unhappy wife, Rosamond, plays the piano, “A hidden soul seemed to be flowing forth from Rosamond’s fingers; and so indeed it was, since souls live on in perpetual echoes” (103). Through Ladislav also, the narrator gestures toward the usefulness of disciplined addiction-like thinking for registering those intense, perpetual echoes, for approaching an array of similitudes across differences. This happier reward of addiction-like strategies reflects Darwinian insights on repetitive variety. It is the reward of a lucid realism denied the maze-treaders in *Bleak House*’s episodic mystery.

CHAPTER 6

THE OPTATIVE MOVEMENT OF *DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE*'S ADDICTS

We tend to speak of possibility in the moodiest of moods: the optative mood, typically phrased in those “if only we were” or “would that I could” constructions. This is the language for expressing desires, for evoking our sense of something unattained. It’s language that communicates, most basically, yearning. Addiction, as a condition that intensifies yearning, ought to intensify reliance on optative language. Yet there has been no critical investigation of the literary uses of the optative mood that emerged in response to nineteenth-century addiction discourse’s new sense of yearning.

This chapter seeks to change that by looking at one Victorian text famous for its habitual, often unhealthy drinkers: Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.¹⁴⁴ I argue that a sense of optative movement—vicarious or dreamt-of wandering—shapes Stevenson’s novella, guiding thoughts and actions of its characters who regularly consume addictive substances. By the Victorian era, addiction had been associated with exploratory, scientific self-experimentation typified by Coleridge and others, but addiction was also linked with indolence; Stevenson reflects both associations in his inventive science-fiction tale, displaying thirsty but indolent explorers who chase after knowledge via avatars or dreams. Such investigators chart an innovative narrative: the novella outlines proto-cinematic experience, not only through its famous story of vicarious movement, but also, most explicitly, through one bibulous character’s dream of moving images, an enduring medium for optative, or wished-for, movement.

¹⁴⁴ Much of this chapter has appeared, in slightly modified form, in the journal *Extrapolation*. See “The Optative Movement of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*’s Addicts,” *Extrapolation* 56.2 (2015): 215–234.

Stevenson's Cinema

‘Alas,’ he cried, ‘is there anything in life so disenchanting as attainment?’ – Prince Florizel in “The Adventure of the Hansom Cabs,” from *The Suicide Club* (I.220).¹⁴⁵

Robert Louis Stevenson thought that his *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* would make a good trade for the poems of John Keats: when thanking his friend Will Low for Low's illustrated edition of Keats's *Lamia*, Stevenson sent him a copy of his novella. Low's *Lamia* had impressed Stevenson, who effused about the illustrations: “My favourite is ‘Bathes unseen’ which is a masterpiece; and the next ‘Into the green recessed woods’ is perhaps more remarkable” (*RLS Letters* V.162). The images gave him ideas. He wished Low would illustrate the rest of Keats's narrative poetry: “I should like to see both ‘Isabella’ and the ‘Eve [of St. Agnes]’ thus illustrated; and then there's ‘Hyperion’—O my God, yes, and *Endymion*” (*RLS Letters* V.162). He added, in an emphatically optative mood, “I should like to see the lot: beautiful pictures dance before me by hundreds” (*RLS Letters* V.162).

Stevenson's repetitively optative language of unmet desire (“I should like . . . I should like”) climaxed here in fittingly optative imagery: pictures dancing by hundreds, pictures hoped for yet unattained by the wishful Stevenson. Alluring passages of solitary luxuriance inspired Stevenson to yearn indolently for movement through more of those

¹⁴⁵ This quote comes from *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Complete Short Stories*, ed. Ian Bell (New York: Henry Holt, 1994).

realms, by way of proto-cinematic, flickering pictures.¹⁴⁶ And appropriately, in the book that he sent in response to Low's Keats, similarly optative language also describes an imagined sense of moving pictures. There, in the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the story of the monstrous Edward Hyde flashes "in a scroll of lighted pictures" through the bibulous lawyer Utterson's mind as he lies on his "great dark bed" and considers Hyde's possible relationship with his friend Jekyll (13). Utterson is part of a social circle of London men who eventually discover that Hyde is Jekyll transformed. Throughout his narrative, Utterson intently explores the world of Hyde but without the most vigorous of efforts; in this scene in the great dark bed, for instance, he merely dreams of movement. Reiterated desirous language delimits for the recumbent lawyer an imagined proto-cinema: Utterson "would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city . . . he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep" (13). He would, he would, in the optative sense of "he wished to be aware" and "he wished to see," given that Utterson does indeed wish to investigate the story of Hyde. Optative movement of imagined proto-cinema thus arises once more from yearning that thrives in indolence.¹⁴⁷ Much of Utterson's exploration, moreover, occurs vicariously, accessed through gossip and letters (see 48–54 or 55–70); his dream especially engages in "vicarious seeing," a phrase film critics have used to describe the basic experience of cinema (McCarthy and Wright 97).

¹⁴⁶ Those lines in *Lamia* are given an indolently relaxed, dream-like context; they surround Keats's assertion, of his mythical characters' lives, that "[r]eal are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass / Their pleasures in a long immortal dream" (127–128).

¹⁴⁷ Scholars have already noted a cinematic tendency in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stewart; Prawer 86–100; Annwn), and Stevenson did have a documented fascination with the projected image. He was particularly drawn to the magic lantern, the image-projector that, for instance, he brought with him in his travels in the Pacific (Colley 126).

In what follows, I continue to explore how *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* portrays this proto-cinematic movement, typically accessed by optative sensibilities though not always phrased in the optative verbal mood. I argue that the novella does all this specifically in terms of indolent pursuit as understood via addiction discourse of the nineteenth century. Such inventive use of Victorian addiction discourse has yet to be examined, though important work already exists on *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s engagement with addiction, work that especially emphasizes addiction's blurring of boundaries between classes (Reed; Driscoll; Zieger). Here, I examine how addiction, the condition of intensely unsatisfied desire, shapes *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s sluggish quests, including those of Dr. Jekyll himself, who compares his experimental habits to habits of a "drunkard" (63). The novella's use of optative prose, its characterizations with regard to unmet desires, its plotting in terms of indolently mediated pursuit: such techniques conform to Stevenson's characters' addictive desire and addiction-like, repetitive investigations informed by repetitive desire. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* thus shows how addiction discourse could suggest new modal orientation—consistently intense commitment to possibility rather than to lively actuality or attainment—that had formal ramifications.

In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, multiple layers of mediation support that commitment to possibility, because those layers of mediation feed repetitive desire for more information without bringing the desirer into immediate, actual contact with the desired. Jekyll's adventures are mediated through the form of Hyde, Utterson's through gossip and through texts that he reads. These investigators maintain distance from actual attainment through that mediation, and they are thus free to ponder a wider range of possibility. Modal logic and theories of possible worlds can elucidate such orientation

toward possibility that arises through intensified mediation. Jaako Hintikka cites *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as an especially useful text for illustrating the possibility made evident by attempts at reference; he discusses the multiple possibilities of Hyde's identity (138–139). Saul Kripke also explains a sort of possibility similar to that pursued by *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s community of thirsty investigators. Kripke describes proper names as a manner of reference spoken into being by a community always engaged with the possible, writing that "proper names are rigid designators, for although the man (Nixon) might not have been the President, it is not the case that he might not have been Nixon (though he might not have been called 'Nixon')" (49). The rigidity of proper names and their correspondence to actuality work because those names accommodate and support an array of possibilities, even the possibility that those names might have been discarded. Utterson's references to Hyde occur with similar regard to possibilities—Hyde may be a blackmailer, a friend of Jekyll's, a monstrous assailant—and this possibility becomes broader when experienced through proliferating attempts at reference (gossip and dreams especially). This dynamic referential modality animates Stevenson's novella, in which indolent, addicted thinkers lazily but in a desirous manner always pursue something more through mediation—that is to say, they pursue slothfully, in the manner of filmgoers.

Along with addiction discourse's increasing prominence, other historical forces would have encouraged Stevenson's cinematic depiction of optative, vicarious movement toward the possible. These include the development of photography. Nancy Armstrong in *Fiction in the Age of Photography* has described related visual exploration in Victorian realism, for instance, in which "fiction was already promising to put readers in touch with the world itself by supplying them with certain kinds of visual information," thus doing

the same kind of work that photography was beginning to do (7). The thirsty characters of Stevenson's fantastical *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, however, seek such visual information with an emphasis not strictly on the world itself, but on its possibilities, on still-to-come scenes and images of experiences that they always pursue but can never fully attain. A world of imagined motion results from and contributes to desires that can never reach static fulfillment; it is a world of images that move in a lighted scroll, a world devised by those always sensitive to possibility. In *The Suicide Club*, Stevenson's Prince Florizel remarks on such an aesthetic power of ongoing yearning, noting that attainment disenchanters (Stevenson, *Complete Stories* I.220). The addict's sense of there always being more to attain would thus support narrative enchantment, and for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s addicted—or at least, habitually drinking—Utterson, the aesthetic enchantment of the world's elusive promise, of ongoing pursuit conducted lazily, suggests sustained, imagined movement.

The novella's vicarious movement all starts with Utterson, who, just before his proto-cinematic reverie, talks to a friend of Jekyll's, Dr. Lanyon, who is sitting "with his wine" (12). The very sociability that takes Utterson to Lanyon comes from his own leisurely, habitual consumption of alcohol: "At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste," we are told of Utterson, "something eminently human beacons from his eye; something indeed which never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life" (5). Those alcohol-inflected acts derive from an interest in *others*, also cultivated by Utterson's drinking habit (5). Alcohol habit, then, supports Utterson's interest in London, which he explores with a still more sociable "man about town," his kinsman

Enfield, who will consequently inspire Utterson's curiosity about Jekyll and Hyde. All this leads to Utterson's dreamy, indolent exploration of Hyde's misdeeds (6-8). Conversation with the wine-drinking Lanyon is described just as the walk with Enfield is: these experiences are either "rambles" (6) or "rambling" (12). In either case, thirsty and indolent pursuit of otherness, of something more, leads Utterson to explore places suggestive of more without marching directly toward fulfillment. Utterson's habitual investigations, encouraged by addictive consumption, thus occur with uncertainty and through casual walks. The result, immediately after his rambles with Lanyon and the man-about-town Enfield, is time spent in a gloomy bed imagining further scenic rambling, a scroll of lighted pictures—a procession of images by which he continues to explore vicariously through lazy movement, described to us in the optative mood.

Below, I first examine Keats's imaginative indolence and the poetic possibility it promises; next I look at Stevenson's appreciation of that Keatsian mood; then I describe how Stevenson explored such an aesthetic of indolence in the intensified terms sanctioned by addiction discourse.¹⁴⁸ The link between indolence and addiction was nothing new. Benjamin Rush, in his influential text on alcohol consumption's dangers, saw indolence as a chief problem for the habitual drunkard, who can become stuck in "languor and stupidity" over the course of "two or three days, before he is able to resume his former habits of business and conversation" (6). Stevenson, in an aesthetic analogue to this conjunction, simply gives his habitual drinkers the imaginative productivity that Keats had already ascribed to inactivity when he referred in his letters to "delicious diligent Indolence" (*Keats Letters* 92). Stevenson's habitual drinkers thirst to move

¹⁴⁸ For more on Keats's fascination with indolence, see Willard Spiegelman's *Majestic Indolence*; for a detailed account of Stevenson's novella's relationship with alcohol addiction, see Thomas Reed's *The Transforming Draught: Jekyll and Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson, and the Victorian Alcohol Debate*.

toward something more in imaginative ways, something more that can never be wholly accessed due to their fundamental indolence. They have this imaginative capability because their broader thinking is often merely *like* their addictive consumption, patterned after addictive tendencies without being strictly limited to addiction. Their indolent habits therefore hold investigative, imaginative potential, much as Keats's indolence would support language that matches its patterns while articulating newly dreamt-up possibilities.

Keats's Intoxicating Indolence

Though both seized on indolent patterns for dreamy new literary worlds, Keats and Stevenson did encounter different stages of the nineteenth century's understanding of bad habits. Keats wrote before De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* recounted the aesthetic thrills of opium addiction, for example, but after the circulation had begun of important early medical works on habitual use of alcohol, such as Thomas Trotter's pioneering study on inebriation published in 1788.¹⁴⁹ Indolence (Keats's preferred bad habit) and habitual intoxication were, however, linked by both Keats's and Stevenson's lifetimes. One representative address on temperance, by a doctor to Cantabrigians in 1805, included a discussion of how indolence could do the same evil work as intemperance or work side-by-side with it: "Moral philosophers unite with physicians of the first rank in opinion," he proclaimed, "that all chronic disorders arise from either 1st. VEXATION OF MIND, or 2d. an INDOLENT AND SEDENTARY LIFE, or 3d. INTEMPERANCE; or from the cooperation of any two of them; or from the

¹⁴⁹ See Trotter's *Dissertatio Medica Inauguralis, Quaedam De Ebrietate, eiusque Efectibus in Corpus Humanum complectens*.

combination of all three” (Waterhouse 12–13). Even earlier, a foundational text on opium use observed that “indolence is a result of prolonged, lavish use of opium. It is as if one had been trained to dance to excellent music and then had the music taken away” (Jones 244–245). Habitual intoxication and indolence had a long history together, well before addiction discourse rose to prominence in the Victorian era and continued to connect the two.

There are, furthermore, passages of Keats’s that make parallels between intoxication and indolence, which he found generally suffused with an almost addictive desire that compels the imagination. In *Hyperion*, “idle” Apollo (III.106) claims an influx of imaginative knowledge—not rare for an indolent character in work by Keats. But Apollo makes clear that this indolent awareness acts on him like wine:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, Sovran voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk . . . (III.113–119)¹⁵⁰

Keatsian indolence supports Apollo’s grandly imaginative mind, intoxicated by the broadest array of possibilities when not much happens actually. He encounters creations and destroyings, “all at once.” That expansive knowledge gained by way of idleness acts on Apollo like wine. This indolence is intoxicating and radiated by desire for something

¹⁵⁰ Anya Taylor writes that Keats “cherishes wine’s transitory power” (169).

not actively accessed, desire that has compelled the mind to think of vast possibility, suggesting an addict's thirst.¹⁵¹

But in the early nineteenth century, addiction had not yet become the preoccupying concern that it would become for Victorians; *Hyperion*, elsewhere, does not dwell so much on the connection between indolence and alcohol. Those lines of idle Apollo's are among the last in the poem, but *Hyperion* opens in the depths of sunken and sober indolence of the older order of gods. This remains an indolent state from which a new kind of imaginative place is described, through language evocative of patterns of indolence. Here, Keats creatively echoes the repetitive physicality of indolence with alliteratively sensory language:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung above his head
Like cloud on cloud . . . (I.1–7)¹⁵²

Anaphoric syntax articulates a constant, indolent link with materiality, as Saturn sits in a vale like a gray, motionless stone, beneath forest on forest.¹⁵³ Syntactically evoked

¹⁵¹ It also recalls Keats's negative capability, the state of comfortably "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (*Keats Letters* 60).

¹⁵² Helen Vendler writes that Keats's "diction of re-creation . . . is a sensual diction . . . Its elements include, as in so many other passages we shall encounter, drowsiness, ripeness, honey, dreams" (37).

¹⁵³ Walter Jackson Bate has described the joining of emotion and physicality in *The Stylistic Development of Keats*: "there was in Keats," he writes, "an instinctive and almost nostalgic craving for absorption and even self-annihilation in that which for him was poetical and which was on all occasions the specifically concrete" (43). Bate continues to note that "nowhere in his verse is this tendency more completely revealed than in *Hyperion*, in the *Eve of St. Agnes*, and in his odes and later sonnets" (44).

recurrence and repetitive sounds of alliteration, however indolent they may be, support literary invention in this scene. Those repetitions reinforce a sonically material yet mythic scene out of fricatives. The result is an imagined and poetically articulated place of cloudy, shrouded mystery, of forests on top of forests, clouds on clouds, of material patterns suggesting a lack of clarity. Indolence produces language that is indolent-like, bogged down in materiality while displaying the imaginative properties of dreamy laziness.

Soon after, in Book I, the Titan Thea addresses the fallen Saturn with attention to an indolent condition and the ongoing questioning prompted by indolence:

Saturn, sleep on: – O thoughtless, why did I

Thus violate thy slumberous solitude?

Why should I ope thy melancholy eyes?

Saturn, sleep on! While at thy feet I weep. (I.68–71)

Anaphoric questioning met with static, stoney silence compels the speaker toward the unanswerable and into the weepy, sleepy, reiterated “ee” sounds of line 71. That which can be repeatedly queried without offering an initial response encourages Thea’s poetic utterance. Thwarted pursuit of answers from a motionless being encourages patterned language of uncertainty, itself rich with the sonorous physicality of assonance.

What exactly does this language do, this language that finds possibility for poetic expression through material, indolent repetitions? In another passage in *Hyperion*, we find anaphoric language creating a place, a comfortable home—a cradle—sounded out by poetic patterns of indolence. Hyperion speaks of

. . . this haven of my rest,

This cradle of my glory, this soft clime,
This calm luxuriance of blissful light,
These crystalline pavilions, and pure fanes,
Of all my lucent empire . . . (I.235–239)

Hyperion reigns over a realm figured as a “cradle,” as a “soft clime,” as, in his enumeration of tranquil properties, “calm luxuriance.” Such a repetitively emphasized domain of indolence is expressed in crisply alliterative c’s and reiterated demonstrative pronouns, through sonic repetitions multiplying in a passage of physical serenity. This poetic indolence supports, in short, a lushly imagined world. Apollo, in his intoxicated idleness, imagines the vast possibilities of the universe; Saturn, sleeping, becomes an object for Thea to wonder and weep at; Hyperion, using similar patterns of indolent poetic repetitions spoken by Apollo and Thea, establishes a comfortably imagined scene all his own. Poetic possibilities for navigation of new places emerge from physical indolence. They emerge through patterns of similar physicality and similar dreaminess, which are used to outline and explore places far from actuality. I will now examine how Stevenson approached such repetitive, indolent investigation of imagined worlds with a sense of aesthetic delight, as in the case of his response to *Hyperion*, about which he commented to Low, “O my God, yes” (*RLS Letters* V.162).

Stevenson’s Keatsian Addiction

In the letter voicing that extreme appreciation, Stevenson considered whether he could be capable of comparable literary beauty. He was, however, haunted by the material ugliness that might belie such aesthetic experience. “The sight of your pictures

has once more awakened me to my right mind,” Stevenson wrote to Low about the illustrated *Lamia*; “something may come of it; yet one more bold push to get free of this prison yard of the abominably ugly, where I take my daily exercise with my contemporaries” (*RLS Letters* V.163). Then Stevenson considered what would become one of literature’s more enduring symbols of ugliness, his own Edward Hyde. He introduced to Low the gift that he was including, his *Strange Case*. “I send you herewith a gothic gnome for your Greek nymph; but the gnome is interesting I think and he came out of a deep mine, where he guards the fountain of tears. It is not always the time to rejoice” (*RLS Letters* V.163). The possibility of noble Romantic transcendence had recalled for Stevenson its opposite: material ugliness.

That same tension structures Stevenson’s “gothic gnome” itself. Respectable Dr. Jekyll’s pursuit of aesthetic pleasure is explicitly described in the text as ugly, abominably material—it takes the form of hideous Hyde (who, however, as Stephen Arata points out, is largely interested in pleasantly bourgeois delights).¹⁵⁴ Stevenson had long seen a related aesthetic possibility that Keats mined from gross materiality. He had commiserated with the similarly tubercular Keats, whose life he saw, writing in 1882, as “a brave and a sad little story”; “the critical part,” he noted, “lies deep in the very vitals of art” (*RLS Letters* III.282–283). In a different letter to Low, Stevenson had located his own writing in sickness—an enjoyed sickness. “I don’t die, damme, and I can’t get along on both feet to save my soul; I am a chronic sickist; and my work cripples along between bed and the parlour, between the medicine bottle and the cupping glass. Well, I like my life all the same” (*RLS Letters* V.162). Materiality intruded on art in challenging ways,

¹⁵⁴ “Over the last half of the novel,” notes Stephen Arata in *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, “Stevenson links Hyde, through a series of verbal echoes and structural rhymes, to various bourgeois ‘virtues’ and practices” (41).

but often with a likeable result as far as Stevenson was concerned, whether in his own case or in Keats's.¹⁵⁵

Critics have already observed that for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, this relationship between the material troubles of sickness and the liberating power of aesthetic pleasure occurs especially through addiction (not unlike Stevenson's habitual movement between "the medicine bottle and the cupping glass").¹⁵⁶ For the novella's habitually drinking investigators, unhealthy material experience leads to mystery. Jekyll compares his experiments with his potion to an experience like that of wine (57), and he says they are like the habits of "a drunkard" (63). Those habits compel him to think in terms of futurity, of yearning—they lead him to optative adventure. Inhabiting the avatar of Hyde, Jekyll "set out through the lamplit streets, in the same divided ecstasy of mind, gloating on my crime, light-headedly devising others in the future" (64). It is that addictively alluring element of futurity that I wish to point out here. Jekyll does not merely vicariously adventure into lamplit streets; he does so with an experimental, scientific desire for possibilities, through his alter-ego Hyde. This story could not exist without such narrative use of optative movement, movement that occurs both remotely and with attention toward the future, the habitually wished-for and chased-after possible.

Addictive indolence enhances that imaginative movement for other, more explicitly alcoholic characters, such as Utterson. I grant that *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

¹⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Stevenson identifies one of the more striking characteristics of Keats's vitality in an ironic perverseness that joins the low with the high. He remarks of Keats, "I have a word or two to say, about the perverted humour which reaches us from him. It is all solemnly taken; but I believe he thought to laugh, and the Hunts, Cowden Clarkes and such believed he was highly serious" (*RLS Letters* III.313). In other words, in Keats, he saw a kindred writer, a sick man who suffused solemn and elevated art with elements of the low, the perverse.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence Driscoll has recently analyzed addiction in *Jekyll and Hyde* that opens possibilities in a more counter-cultural way—Stevenson, he writes, "has offered us an opening in the rhetoric of drugs. An opening that, on reflection, could be infinitely beneficial: drugs can offer us 'no end of practical usefulness'" (63).

might not seem like a Keatsian tale of indolence's creative properties. It is, after all, full of active, ambulatory characters who walk around London investigating. For the most part, however, those characters are only vaguely professional—barely or indeterminately employed, wine-drinking transmitters of stories. And as mentioned, their walking is like their alcoholic conversation, and described by Stevenson in the same way: as casual, directionless “rambling.”

Stevenson's correlation of rambles with alcoholic habits might have owed to certain historical factors. It was, first, simply more likely for a writer to describe any experience as similar to substance-dependence in the 1880s than at the beginning of the century. With the rise of temperance movements, all manner of addiction became a public concern, and aesthetic habits were thought similar to drug habits.¹⁵⁷ Toxic habit may have already been linked to indolence in Keats's time, and Keats may have at moments related his idle characters' experience to the drinking of wine, but alcoholism had become a far more pressing and officially recognized issue by Stevenson's day. Alcohol consumption in England had been increasing throughout the nineteenth century due to causes that included “wretched and debilitating” industrial life in which “the public house, for all its deficiencies, was often the one oasis of recreational activity, open to all, at little cost” (Greenaway 7-8). Consumption of alcohol per capita had reached its peak only shortly before Stevenson published *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in the period from 1875 to 1879 (Greenaway 8). Prominent temperance movements on the rise in this period included the Alliance for the Suppression of the Traffic in All Intoxicating Liquors (started in 1853), which sought William Gladstone's aid in the banning of alcohol sales

¹⁵⁷ For more on the parallel between reading and drug addiction that was often invoked by Victorians, see *The Reading Lesson*, where Patrick Brantlinger describes a related rise of the view of widely accessible literary entertainment as poison, as a powerfully bad habit.

while Stevenson was working on *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Reed 99). Stevenson himself, who enjoyed wine, was quite aware of the risks of alcoholic habit, as Thomas Reed points out. He had a “wrenching sense that drink could always do him in, could cast his ship of life onto deadly rocks” (Reed 56).

Yet *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* does not simply extend an age’s cliché of addiction to just any topic; the novella centers around a particular kind of habitual drinker, the kind drawn to relaxed but curious seeking. Dr. Lanyon, who drinks wine sociably, studies Jekyll’s potion in simultaneously appetitive and exploratory language; after perusing the chemicals of Jekyll’s “liquor,” he observes that he had “whetted his curiosity” (50). Appetitive curiosity occurs in other scenes of drinking, too, such as when Jekyll hosts a dinner for “judges of good wine” (19). At the dinners, we are told, after drunken conviviality, those present “liked to sit awhile in [Utterson’s] unobtrusive company, practicing for solitude, sobering their minds in the man’s rich silence after the expense and strain of gaiety” (19). Alcoholic consumption inspires movement toward something other, which in this scene means the sober experience of solitude and difference after exhausting fraternal enjoyment. This is the addiction-like interest accompanying enjoyment of habit-forming intoxicants; it is an interest that maintains a sluggish attention to strangeness in the manner of the diligent indolence in Keats’s poetry.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ It is worth noting that Stevenson never diagnoses his characters as alcoholic, even if at times his novella’s characterization of powerful drinking habits combined with indolence reflects and suggests Victorian discourse on alcoholism. Nabokov recognized *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as a text structured by a more enjoyably drunken approach to mystery. As he observes, “There is a delightful winery taste about this book; in fact, a good deal of old mellow wine is drunk in the story” (180). Stevenson himself, in an optimistic moment, had said, “Happiness is a matter of bottled stout” (qtd Reed 53).

The Addict's Rambles

For a number of Victorian observers, addictive consumption appeared especially plainly to support lazy movement or rambling. Henry Mayhew's accounts of vagrants include, in addition to statements about "tramping it across the country just to pass the time" (387), discussion of regular alcohol consumption, of "larking, and drinking" (389). In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels observes an aimless flow of people through the streets in terms of habitual intoxication among the working class: "On Saturday evenings, especially when wages are paid and work stops somewhat earlier than usual, when the whole working class pours from its own poor quarters into the main thoroughfares, intemperance may be seen in all its brutality" (152). The working class pours through the city in this passage, flowing like intoxicating drink itself, rushing into the streets, moving fluidly but repetitively (on Saturday evenings) according to its intemperance.¹⁵⁹

Such lazy movement, elsewhere, carried with it class-specific worries—worries of an amorously drifting, uncontrolled mob. Meanwhile, Victorian middle-class drinking was increasingly attempted in private. "By the 1850s," notes Brian Harrison, "no respectable urban Englishman entered an ordinary public-house" (46). The drinking professionals of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* often, likewise, try to keep some distance from the disreputable through mediation or by strolling *around* rather than directly *into* the criminal underworld that fascinates them (in Jekyll's case, strolling into the underworld occurs through the mediation of his alter-ego, Hyde). They derive thrills from imaginatively crossing this private/public boundary. Their habits incline them toward the

¹⁵⁹ Wandering could also become a salutary replacement for alcoholism, if the effect could be separated from the cause; Peter Bailey has noted how reformers had contended that public walking could become a form of "rational" or healthier "recreation" (53).

possibility that their material world in all its grubbiness has to offer, toward the multiple discoveries and meanings always suggested by their ongoing material experience, but they strive, in the spirit of indolent exploration and in the spirit of their class, to keep some space between them and those possibilities.

Such extreme openness to possibility blurs distinctions and fixed meanings, including those of class. Hyde, Jekyll, Utterson—they all start to resemble each other in their aesthetic habits. They all habitually ramble toward trouble in their city. Keats, too, had found a fluid relationship with class by way of indolent aesthetics, and much scholarship on Stevenson and Keats over the past few decades has focused on such class-fluidity.¹⁶⁰ Both writers had a dynamic, inconsistent relationship to their social positions (as we see in Keats's allegiance to both rich, elevated, Miltonic language and a supposedly Cockney style; as we see in Stevenson's middle-class bohemianism). Both had found literary possibility that electrified and altered the most statically reified, habitual experience. In the case of Stevenson's novella, near-frozen laziness comes to narratable life through alcoholic rambles that lead to the underworld, due to the possibility his drinkers find pulsing through their patterns of material experience that never lead to satiety. Just as Keats's Titans want something remote from their concrete, indolent state of dispossession—a desire that motivates them to speak forth and live through ambitious poetry—Utterson from his position of addicted indolence launches desirously, if vicariously, into the underworld's narrative thrills.

¹⁶⁰ For discussions of Keats's relationship to history and class see: the essays by Hartman, McGann, and Fry in *Romantic Poetry: Recent Revisionary Criticism*; Jeffrey Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle*; and Marjorie Levinson's *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*. For Stevenson's relationship to class, see especially Arata's *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*.

Because he is always in pursuit, Utterson's story traces a labyrinthine place. To some extent, the experience of this place is shaped by intoxicating substances, not just addiction to those substances. At one point, confounded by the case of Jekyll, Utterson sits with Mr. Guest, his clerk, with "midway between [them], at a nicely calculated distance from the fire, a bottle of a particular old wine that had long dwelt unsunned in the foundations of his house" (28). The wine itself has world-changing properties: "In the bottle the acids were long ago resolved; the imperial dye had softened with time, as the colour grows richer in stained windows; and the glow of hot autumn afternoons on hillside vineyards, was ready to be set free and to disperse the fogs of London" (28–29). Even one dose of alcohol can, physiologically, alter Utterson's experience of the world. And because each dose never wholly satisfies, because wine that already changes perception is habitually imbibed while inclining Utterson to consider otherness in that world (5), wine especially guides him habitually toward the possible, toward the in-flux world seen fleetingly through the fog.

Stevenson's novella thus complements Keats's project of indolently exploring and outlining imagined worlds. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* simply responds to a more actively participatory indolence, using the framework of sociable addiction and experimental repetitions that form Utterson's consideration and pursuit of otherness in his city. The result, though accessed through mediation of gossip or through letters from the likes of Lanyon and Jekyll, is Utterson's imagined pursuit, imagined movement—his proto-cinematic sensibility. Utterson thus conceives of a scroll of lighted pictures, an in-process, scenic world. Because he is more interested in possibility than attainment, because "others" in general interests him, and because he is fundamentally indolent, Utterson

welcomes that mediation into his exploration. Letters, gossip, dreams: these things cast his mind across space and time, initiating encounters with strangeness that the Uttersonian addict craves and that is entailed by mediation's inherent distancing between its referents and audience. And, given film's temporal dimension, its ongoing movement toward something more in a material scene, an anticipated cinema proves a suitable vehicle for Utterson's dreams of addictively ongoing, vicarious exploration.

Material Immateriality

Utterson, wine-drinking Dr. Lanyon, and potion-swilling Dr. Jekyll all come to understand their city through drinks that compel mediated, rambling attention to otherness. Dr. Lanyon, having directly encountered the material core of this novella's mysterious possibility (having witnessed the Jekyll/Hyde transformation), even argues for the importance in maintaining a relationship with possibility rather than totally resolved revelation. "Well, life has been pleasant," he says, recalling a lifetime of investigation. "I liked it; yes, sir, I used to like it. I sometimes think if we knew all, we should be more glad to get away" (32). Such an investigator has enjoyed not knowing or having it all. His indolently addiction-like hopes direct his thoughts toward the possible instead of attainment, and he describes in optative language of "should" how we would recoil at meeting with absolute possession of knowledge: we would immediately react in terms of what we "should be glad to" do, with a sense of what we wished: in optative terms.

These habitual investigators reproduce possible worlds for one another, as well, because their addictive habits are so socially embedded and outwardly attentive. In the midst of their investigations, they share stories of places that feed one another's sense of

there always being something more to explore. Enfield, while rambling through town, tells Utterson of “Blackmail House,” a merely possible designation for the place into which he had seen Hyde enter—a possible place, but a place to be investigated nonetheless (9). This shared world becomes enriched with mystery. The novella’s characters live with animating possibility discovered through never-satisfied investigations of the material all around them—they discover, in Jekyll’s words, “the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated” (69).

Jekyll himself uses a habitually imbibed substance to turn into Hyde and thus discover London’s slimy possibilities. His adventure is not quite Utterson’s, though—less comfortable, more dangerous—and their respective potions reflect this. As Vladimir Nabokov writes, “one recalls the wine that Utterson so comfortably sips. This sparkling and comforting draft is very different from the icy pangs caused by the chameleon liquor, the magic reagent that Jekyll brews in his dusty laboratory” (180). Yet both wine and the “chameleon liquor” advance plot as they are consumed repetitively, and both feed characters who drift through a murkily understood, labyrinthine city. More to the point, these habits actually cause, in both Utterson’s and Jekyll’s case, characters to enter into a narrative of investigation. Jekyll’s habit does so rather obviously, compelling him into the mysterious world of Hyde, while wine causes Utterson’s “eminently human” and “approved tolerance for others” to emerge, and addictively ongoing consumption then guides him regularly toward otherness (5).¹⁶¹ Utterson, however, by pursuing his

¹⁶¹ In *Inventing the Addict*, Susan Zieger describes *Jekyll and Hyde* as Stevenson’s attempt to use classifications including addiction “in order to make a case against them. By doing so, he hoped to preserve a mode of homosocial conviviality, signaled by the loosening pleasure of alcohol” (194–195). See also

pleasures more comfortably, more indolently, and through more mediation, maintains a greater degree of safety and proto-cinematic appreciation of narrative.

With Jekyll, we see the addict's investigations go too far, until they unite possible with actual through dead material—"the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching . . . the face of Edward Hyde" (44). Until then, characters move from one solid point to other possibilities, exploring a place through optative rambling—as with Hyde's poorly elaborated exploits stemming from Jekyll's lurid desires, and as with Utterson's strolls with his relative Enfield that lead him to consider what he "would." This is a condition Michel de Certeau has found in the city always being produced by consumers, never firmly established as a fixed place: "The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates," he writes, "makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place" (Certeau 103). Robert Mighall notes, too, of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, "The narrative suggests a disruption enacted in terms of class and urban geography. Part of the horror with which Jekyll's circle regards Hyde is owing to his lack of deference and his not knowing his place" (151).¹⁶² Jekyll, Utterson, and Enfield are all also identified by consumption habits that compel them about the city, becoming ramblers without a clearly defined, static place, all in pursuit of the possibility represented by Hyde, a being of the most intense and criminal possibility.

But Hyde, for all his possibilities, also represents ultimate materiality in the story—a paradox, except perhaps for one as familiar with Keats as Stevenson was. For both writers, repetitive and sick material experience compelled the mind to think beyond

Gwen Hyman's *Making a Man: Gentlemanly Appetites in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* for more on the relationship between Victorian masculinity and consumption.

¹⁶² Peter Ackroyd observes a similar blurring of physical specificity in the novel, calling *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* the "greatest novel of London fog . . . in which the fable of changing identities and secret lives takes place within the medium of the city's 'shifting insubstantial mists'" (Ackroyd 430).

the mundane.¹⁶³ Thus while Hyde is himself excessively material, he unleashes the full force of the imaginative element of the novel's plot. "Mr Hyde," we are told, is physically notable, but so much so that he evades description; he "was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation" (16). Stevenson's addicted characters habitually circle around this and related kinds of living, breathing, speaking materiality that can be described in any number of ways; they are addictively drawn to material experience rich with possibility, and Hyde's very being is the product of Jekyll's addictive desires for material possibility. Jekyll recognizes this ultimate link between possibility and materiality; as he puts it, he discovers a "trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience, of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired" (56). That experience of trembling solidity, he says, "braced and delighted me like wine" (57). Here Jekyll describes an alcoholic aesthetic experience of imagined movement—the enjoyment of a bodiless body, of material trembling into something immaterial, something different from immediate actuality.

The story ends when its core material mystery is dispelled, when Hyde is no longer distanced or mediated from the world of Jekyll and instead joins with Jekyll completely via their shared corpse. There are fewer possibilities, at last, for the addicted investigators to ponder. Until this point, possibility and animating mystery flourish in the novella's foggy London of alcoholic wanderers. Utterson, indolent as he is, has contemplated this world most safely, by ongoing movement accessible through imagination and mediation—through, especially, a dreamt-up scroll of lighted pictures.

¹⁶³ Peter Brooks notes of nineteenth-century fiction that it is "as if the underworld of the transgressive and dangerous social elements were the last fund of 'narratable' material in an increasingly bland social and literary system" (Brooks 85).

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